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"HAROLD, FORGIVE ME," SHE MOANED, "DO NOT SEND ME FROM YOU. AM I NOT SUFFICIENTLY PUNISHED ALREADY?"

CYNTHIA'S CRIME.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

WEST LANGDON was on tiptoe with expectation. A sense of mild excitement and pleasurable anticipation pervaded the usually quiet not to say drowsy village. This excitement culminated at Rose Cottage, the residence of Miss Deborah Robinson, a spinster lady of uncertain age. Cynthia Maybrooke, Miss Deborah's niece, was to be married to-morrow; and a marriage, or any other event worth noting, was always welcome and gratefully received as sleepy, picturesque West Langdon.

Tradespeople from the nearest town came and went, Rose Cottage being the centre towards which they one and all converged. Some of

Cynthia's girl-friends had dressed the interior of the grey old church with fragrant spring flowers.

Presentations still continued to arrive for the bride-elect, although her travelling trunks were already packed.

Miss Deborah, a thin, brisk, active lady, with her mob cap all askew, was here, there, and everywhere at once; now in the kitchen, now in the tiny dining-room, where the wedding breakfast was being set out; scolding, directing, and setting everyone about her a wonderful example of indomitable energy.

The cause of all this unusual stir and commotion had retired to the orchard at the back of the cottage with a book. She might have been merely a disinterested looker-on, she took so small a share in the preparations for her approaching wedding.

Yet as she sat there under the apple-trees with a rain of pink-and-white blossoms falling every now and then upon her book and her dark hair, Cynthia was acutely conscious in her lazy,

luxurious fashion, of the busy, expectant bridal atmosphere that surrounded her.

It gave her a pleasant sense of importance. It was nice to know that so many people were interested in her marriage; that so many wheels had been set in motion for her, while she merely looked on and expressed her satisfaction with everything.

Barely nineteen, Cynthia Maybrooke was already a queenly, self-possessed woman. Her beauty was of the voluptuous Oriental type that so quickly attains its maturity. Stately, indolent, regal, nature had formed her to accept homage gracefully, to be toiled for by others, who would deem it a privilege thus to be permitted to serve her. If she had any other vocation in life, Cynthia had not yet found it.

Tall, slender, and exquisitely proportioned, with large, languid, dark eyes full of slumberous fire, a pure olive complexion, and soft, straight blue-black hair coiled low down on a long graceful neck like the stem of some tropical flower, Cynthia's rare beauty dawned upon most people

seeing it for the first time as a fresh experience.

Memory furnished them with no prototype. Dark, starry, radiant, it dazzled and fascinated them, while the coldness of the girl's manner rather added to the charm produced by her face than otherwise, since it supplied a powerful contrast.

Cynthia had lived with her Aunt Deborah at West Langdon as long as she could remember. Her father, an officer, had been killed in action during the Crimean War. All his money having been expended in the purchase of his commission Cynthia would have been entirely dependent upon her aunt but for the Government pension she enjoyed as the daughter of an officer killed in action. This had supplied her with clothes and pocket-money, Aunt Deborah contributing the rest.

With an innate craving for change and society, the dulness of West Langdon had chafed and irritated Cynthia's impatient, rebellious spirit, until Harold Fontagne, the promising young sculptor, whose statue of *Haidée* exhibited in the sculpture-room of the Royal Academy had recently attracted universal attention, came to stay with some friends in the neighbourhood.

It was a case of love at first sight on both sides. Harold Fontagne proposed to the beautiful girl who had won his heart, and, to the annoyance of the unsuccessful lovers who had preceded him, Cynthia consented to become his wife.

Without being rich Harold Fontagne was in a position to afford his bride every reasonable luxury and a nice name. He had pleaded hard for a short engagement, that he might be able to take Cynthia abroad with him that summer for a long, delightful honeymoon. Aunt Deborah had given way, and thus far the course of true love had run as smoothly as the lovers could wish.

Harold Fontagne and his best man, Bertie Randolph, were expected to arrive from town that evening. In spite of her outward calm Cynthia was counting the hours yet to elapse ere her lover could be with her again.

Her love for Harold Fontagne amounted to idolatry. It was sinful, in so far as it blotted out Heaven from her sight, rendering her sublimely indifferent to everything save the fact of that love being returned. Once married to Harold what save death would have the power to mar her passionate, unrestrained happiness? And death was such a remote contingency—no need to think of that yet.

To-morrow her new life would begin in earnest. West Langdon and *enauit*, anonymous terms, would have been left behind for ever. To visit the distant lands which she had so often yearned to see, with the man she loved as her companion and clewone, to feel herself for ever emancipated from dulness and boredom, sailing down the broad sunlit stream of life, what bliss could equal this, far less excel it!

Her dreamy reverie was broken in upon by Aunt Deborah, armed with a pair of scissors and several sheets of white paper.

"Goodness gracious, child!" began that lady, sharply. "Can't you find anything better to do than sit here and read when we are all so busy indoors? I want these frills cut to go round the hems. You can do that surely! Bring them inside when they're ready, and then you can arrange the flowers in the *operges*. Mary and I have had no end of trouble with the blanch-manges. They won't set well, the weather being too warm. They wobble about till I'm in agonies lest they should fall all to pieces before to-morrow comes."

Cynthia laughed as she commenced cutting the frills in her delicate deliberate way. She did not share her aunt's anxiety about the blanch-manges. Why go out of the way at all to prepare an elaborate wedding-breakfast! Who would bestow their thoughts upon eating and drinking at such a time! Thus argued Cynthia, her youth and love blinding her to the fact that elderly people are prosaic enough to think of something besides sentiment, even at a wedding-breakfast.

She cut the frills, arranged the flowers, submitted to have her wedding-dress tried on again to make quite sure it was a perfect fit; then she

escaped with a feeling of thankfulness. Going to the garden-gate, she stood there looking down the road. In less than half-an-hour Harold would be with her. He and Bertie Randolph would be dining at the cottage. After dinner they were to adjourn to the "Spotted Magpie," the only hostelry West Langdon could boast of, where sleeping accommodation had been secured for the two men.

West Langdon was built on rising, wooded ground that sloped gently to the sea-shore. In the calm, tender evening light, the picturesque straggling village, its detached houses surrounded by gardens and orchards, wore an aspect of brooding peace. No sound broke the dreamy stillness save the murmur of the waves far below.

As Cynthia stood at the gate, the cool, dewy, fragrant clusters of purple lilac, the laburnum's golden chains brushed her fair face on either side, as the breeze swayed them, with mute, caressing gesture.

"The spring of the year, the spring of my life also," murmured the girl, gladly. "To-morrow, only to-morrow, and what a change! No more dull days and discontent; they will vanish from sight with West Langdon. As Harold's wife I shall know only happiness. His love will render the fair scenes we are so soon to gaze upon together doubly fair. He will shield me from all that is hard and unpleasant, my king among men! How brave, how noble and gifted he is! Any woman might be proud to bear his name. His talent must win lasting fame and fortune for him ere long. Harold will occupy a prominent niche in the world's great gallery, and I shall share it with him. Why, we are rich already in the anticipation of such a golden future."

Gratitude was not Cynthia's strong point. Otherwise she might have felt a little more regret at leaving West Langdon, where her life had been monotonous. She had at least met with plenty of unaffected kindness there.

Glancing down the road again her eyes brightened, and a sudden flush suffused the clear olive of her cheek. She had caught sight of two men approaching the cottage at a brisk pace, and she drew back hastily to avoid being seen in turn.

Cynthia was in the drawing-room with her aunt when Harold Fontagne and Bertie Randolph were announced. After the first greetings had taken place, Bertie good-naturedly devoted himself to Aunt Deborah, leaving Harold and Cynthia free to escape through the open French windows into the garden to enjoy a quiet undisturbed conversation.

Harold Fontagne was a tall, well-made man of five-and-twenty. His features were, if anything, too regular; his fine grey eyes had a cold, steely expression when the love-light was not there, warming and softening them; his thin, well-cut lips were firm to the verge of obstinacy. The face was more expressive of reason and intellect than passion, or any gentler feeling.

Yet Harold Fontagne had always proved himself to be a firm friend, a faithful, devoted lover—those who had contrived to incur his displeasure affirmed him to be a good hater also—upright, just, honourable, but pitiless and unforgiving towards anyone who had sinned against his code of right and wrong, or attempted to do him an injury.

Cynthia had only seen the pleasant side of her lover's nature; she was not likely to come into contact with the other even when they were married.

"We shall be gazing upon a very different scene this time to-morrow evening, darling!" he said, fondly, as he passed his arm round her waist and kissed her with a proud, glad air of possession. "You are sure to like Paris, Cynthia; it will reconcile you to the loss of West Langdon."

"You don't really suppose that I am sorry to leave this place where I have been buried alive all my life!" she replied, yielding to his caress. "And even if I loved it dearly I would quit it without a regret, in order to accompany you, Harold."

"My queen! You cannot tell how I value the priceless treasure of your love and your unbounded confidence in me, Cynthia! By the

way, I am grateful to your godfathers and godmothers for having bestowed such a name upon you. It suits you to perfection!"

"Aunt Deborah mourns over it ceaselessly," said the girl, with a laugh. "She thinks it heathenish and unorthodox in the extreme. If she could have had her way I should have been christened Matilda Ann Maybrooke."

"What a blessed escape for you, child! Cynthia expresses your beauty so thoroughly. It is of the night—dark, starry, passionate, intense. You are as lovely as your starry namesake, and, fortunately for me, more attainable. Krample is contagious. What do you think, Cynthia! Bertie Randolph is about to get married!"

"Indeed!" said Cynthia, without evincing much interest. "Who is she, Harold?"

"Kitty Weilden, the daughter of an artist long since dead. She is a nice little girl, and Bertie is awfully fond of her. I am glad for the dear old fellow's sake that she has accepted him."

"And I am glad also, only for a different reason," she replied, lightly. "It may be foolish, Harold, but I am quite jealous of the close friendship existing between you and Bertie Randolph. I—I want you all to myself. I cannot allow Bertie's claims or anyone else's. When he is married you will see less of him; he will monopolise less of your affection."

"This jealousy is unworthy of you, Cynthia," said Harold Fontagne, gravely. "Bertie Randolph, in spite of his marriage, will always remain what he is now, my dearest friend. Years ago, when we were in Rome, pupils of the same great Italian sculptor, Bertie nursed me through a long, dangerous attack of malaria, interrupting his studies for my sake without a murmur. Since then we have been close friends, and he has given me many proofs of his candid, unselfish nature, his willingness to study my interests even before his own. You must try to like Bertie for my sake, Cynthia, or I shall think you deem my heart too narrow to contain friendship as well as love."

Aunt Deborah's voice, informing them that dinner would be ready in ten minutes, put a stop to further conversation.

Cynthia went indoors, not inclined to regard Bertie Randolph more favourably by reason of the gentle reproof he had been the unconscious means of drawing upon her.

Bertie, a slim young fellow, with wavy brown hair allowed to grow rather long, blue eyes, a complexion delicate as a girl's, was unaware of the dislike and jealousy entertained for him by Harold's fiancée.

He admired Cynthia as a magnificent woman, and thought her worthy of his friend, for whom no woman could surely be too good, without, however, falling in love with her himself. That superb Oriental type of beauty struck no responsive chord in Bertie Randolph's nature. Cynthia would not have been his choice, even had Kitty failed to cross his path or engross his affections so completely.

The next morning dawned clear and bright; the weather, like everything else, had favoured Cynthia.

As if in a dream, from which she would presently awake, she went through with the events of that wonderful day—tears and congratulations, bell-ringing and flower-scattering, speeches and adieux, followed by a shower of old satin slippers and rice. Then she was being driven away in the carriage with Harold, Aunt Deborah's tearful face, and Bertie Randolph's bright one standing out prominently amidst her reminiscences of West Langdon, as she last saw it—a living, breathing poem, in the freshness and beauty of the spring.

CHAPTER II.

CYNTHIA'S honeymoon in no wise fell short of her expectations. Looking back upon it afterwards, when there had been time for it to "orb into the perfect star" she saw not when she moved therein, the young wife recognised it as the happiest period of her existence. Nothing that preceded it, or was destined to follow it,

equalled that honeymoon tour in perfect unalloyed happiness, fresh delightful experiences, and satisfied unquestioning love.

Life opened suddenly out before her, rich, full, glorious teeming with possibilities of future bliss. Harold was a devoted, loverlike husband, proud of his beautiful wife and the universal admiration she excited. And there was no lurking serpent of jealousy to creep in and mar the loveliness of their paradise.

They went out a great deal, and Cynthia's beauty caused men to hover constantly round her, like moths anxious to be smothered. Yet, although her manner had gained in warmth and geniality since her marriage, rendering her far more attractive, she never gave any of her would-be admirers the least encouragement to overstep conventional limits when talking with her.

Cynthia had a wholesome horror of flirting wives, while her intense, idolatrous love for Harold and his devotion to her prevented her from having a thought to bestow upon any other man, thus shielding her from all temptation in that direction.

Perhaps, ere they returned to England, each had gained a deeper insight into the other's character.

Harold Fontagne knew that the voluptuous, indolent, luxurious element in Cynthia's nature frequently showed itself upon the surface, that her pride and ambition kept equal pace with her love, while Cynthia had discovered that, in spite of his tender, loverlike manner, her husband could be very firm when he pleased.

Beyond a certain point even she could not influence him or change his decision. He had a will of iron.

Nevertheless, these slight disenchantments in no wise served to lessen their mutual love. Perhaps it would be impossible to live through the honeymoon without them.

The newly-married couple took possession of the pretty villa at Richmond that had been furnished and prepared for them during their absence. Harold going back to his work full of fresh energy, his creative brain bent upon achieving yet nobler triumphs.

Beneath his hand the marble seemed to become instinct with life. He spent many hours each day in the studio, which had been built on to the villa.

Cynthia saw comparatively but little of her husband. His art absorbed him to an extent that induced her to regard it in the light of a formidable rival.

She would have preferred living in London and going more into society. The craving for admiration, the desire to queen it over other women, was strong upon her.

Much as she loved her husband the desire for constant change and excitement that had been so strong upon her at West Langdon still remained.

The brilliant honeymoon had satisfied this craving for awhile, and set it at rest.

The subsequent quiet life at Richmond brought it back with renewed force. Why, it was only one degree better than West Langdon!

Cynthia became an ardent student of the society journals. As she read of the social triumphs achieved by this and that well-known beauty her impatient longing to emulate, if not to excel, these queens of society in their frequent conquests, their dazzling reign, became almost unbearable.

"I could meet them upon equal ground as far as looks go!" she exclaimed to herself once, throwing the paper that contained an account of the beautiful Mrs. Fitz-Falk's presentation at Court from her with an irritable gesture. "Few women could outshine me in my own peculiar style. Oh! it is hard to be shut out from what I most desire! Once fairly launched in society, victory would follow as a matter of course. I should not rest until I had gained the topmost rung of the ladder. As the wife of a successful man, this chance, this opening, which is all I require, would be mine. But success is so slow in coming. Even Harold, clever as he is, cannot command it at once."

Cynthia was not altogether unreasonable. She

accepted the unpleasant fact that until her husband had succeeded in establishing his success upon a firm basis he must needs devote himself assiduously to his art, and give but little time to society. None the less it annoyed her to think it must be so when she would fain have had it otherwise.

Although Haldée had been sold for a considerable sum and won praise for the young sculptor, commissions did not pour in upon him as fast as he had expected. He was still glad to fill up his time by working for the dealers.

The beautiful lifelike marble forms that surrounded his studio were slow to disappear. Cynthia sometimes regarded them half reproachfully as she stood amidst the grand, impressive creations of the sculptor's brain.

They ought to bring him both fame and fortune, yet there they stood—sublimely lovely, and alas! unsold.

"Cynthia, you are not looking well; you spend too much time alone," said Harold Fontagne, regarding his young wife's pale face with some anxiety, when she came to pay him a visit in the studio one morning. "You want more change and society. What do you say, darling? Shall we invite Bertie Randolph and his wife to spend a week with us? They will be pleased to come, and you can make Kitty's acquaintance. You have hardly seen anything of her yet."

"Just as you like, dear!" replied Cynthia, languidly, turning to inspect a "Nymph Bathing," her husband's latest production. "As you say, I have seen very little of Mrs. Randolph, and it is dull to be quite so much alone."

"Write to-day and ask them to come," said Harold, who, in his sculptor's blouse, was moulding the plastic clay into the semblance of a light-footed, graceful Ariel. "It will bring us together again. I have seen so little of Bertie lately, and I want his opinion upon my Ariel. First and foremost, what do you think of it, darling? Does it jar upon your ideal of the frolicsome sprite?"

"No," rejoined Cynthia, slipping her arm in her husband's. "It is lovely, a personification of grace and life, and swift glad motion! I hope someone will purchase it, Harold. Your work is so good that it ought to be appreciated."

She left the studio presently and returned to the drawing-room to write her letter of invitation to Kitty Randolph.

The Randolphs lived at Chislehurst, where Bertie's aunt had left him a pretty cottage. The fact of living at some distance from each other had prevented that close intimacy which, previous to their respective marriages, had existed between the two men. Cynthia no longer felt jealous of her husband's liking for Bertie Randolph, or anxious to keep them apart, while Bertie's success as a sculptor had not been sufficiently pronounced to give rise to envious angry feelings within her breast.

He was not likely to outshine Harold; and aware of her husband's superior talent and progress, Cynthia could afford to think leniently of poor Bertie, who wrote to them in such high spirits whenever he could obtain a trifling commission, or a purchaser who seemed likely to pay.

The invitation to spend a week at Richmond with the Fontagnes was accepted, chiefly through Kitty's agency. Bertie, rendered dependent by repeated disappointments and pecuniary troubles, would have sent a refusal. But his wife, like the wise little woman she was, overruled his objection, and persuaded him to go.

"Harold will feel hurt and annoyed if you refuse, Bertie, and it will do you good to be with him again for a few days," she said, brightly; "besides, I want to cultivate Mrs. Fontagne's society. We have only met once, you know. Brooding over our troubles at home won't serve to lessen them. Perhaps the very fact of an absence will break the spell, and bring us something worth having. You have been working and worrying too much lately, poor boy. A week at Richmond will do you a world of good."

So they went, and Cynthia exerted herself to render their stay a pleasant one. She invited

some people to meet the Randolphs, and arranged a fresh, varied programme for each day.

Between boating excursions, picnics, afternoon teas, and other mild dissipation, the time fled swiftly. It had never occurred to Kitty to feel jealous of the friendship existing between her husband and Harold Fontagne; since it gave the former pleasure, that was enough to render it welcome to her.

No leaven of selfishness mingled with her love; and if the two men, glad to be together again, spent hours in the studio or the smoking-room by themselves, the annoyed expression that dawned upon Cynthia's lovely face at being thus neglected was never reflected in Kitty's.

Bertie's wife was a small, lightly-built girl, with soft, untidy, loosely-collared brown hair, pretty but sharply-cut features, dark swift-glancing eyes, from which mirth seemed to radiate, and a sensitive, mobile mouth, in sympathy with those expressive sparkling dangerous eyes.

A girl quick to detect other people's weak points and hold them up to good-humoured ridicule, a very incarnation of merriment, youth, and vitality.

She had neither Cynthia's beauty, nor her air of stately repose. Yet a more fit wife for nervous, sensitive Bertie Randolph could hardly have been found than Kitty.

She had those qualities in which he was most lacking. She stood between her susceptible, easily-depressed husband and the hard prosaic realities of everyday life, which he was too impractical to manage skilfully. With plenty of tact, energy and worldly wisdom she fought his battles as well as her own, shielding him from petty cares and annoyances as much as possible, leaving his mind free to centre itself upon his work.

Impatient tradespeople would have had to pass over Kitty's body before they reached her husband's studio to pester him with their small accounts.

Naturally inclined to look upon the bright side of things herself, she cheered and encouraged Bertie when on the verge of giving up in despair, until her love and sympathy had become absolutely necessary to the young sculptor. Bereft of them he would have drifted like a rudderless vessel on the stormy waters of life!

Bertie was proud. Not even to his old friend, Harold Fontagne, would he confess how adverse Fate had proved to him. When his work was alluded to he took refuge in vague generalities, contriving to convey the impression that on the whole he was making fair headway.

Had he been more frank a great deal of sin and suffering in the future might have been averted. As it was, Cynthia Fontagne, listening to his statements with regard to his own affairs, imagined him to be prospering quite as much as Harold, and felt aggrieved therat. Surely Harold, with his superior genius, ought to be far ahead of the less-gifted Bertie Randolph!

His own want of success did not prevent Bertie from admiring his friend's beautiful creations, and bestowing honest praise, unalloyed with envy, upon them.

Both men were clever, but there was a grandeur, a daring originality of conception and execution about Harold's work that Bertie's lacked.

Delicately wrought, full of ideal beauty and grace, embodying the sculptor's refined, subtle imagination, Bertie's statues were wanting in the force and vigour, the sense of power, pertaining to those of his friend. He felt this and strove to remedy the defect, but in vain.

"Well, little woman, what do you think of Harold's wife?" inquired Bertie, when they were in the train, on their way back to Chislehurst. "You have seen enough of her during the past week to justify you in forming an opinion."

"She is very beautiful," said Kitty slowly, "and she has been kind to us, so I ought not to traduce her. But I don't like her, Bertie. There is something in her manner that repels me. If she and I were to be together for twenty years we should never become friends."

"Why not, you queer child!" laughed her husband, conscious of entertaining a similar sentiment towards Cynthia.

"For one thing, I fancy she is selfish. She did not care for you to monopolise Harold so completely, although she could see how pleased you were to be together again. It annoyed her. She would fain have her husband's attention centred upon herself. She is very fond of him in her grand, indolent passionate way, but such love is only a refinement of selfishness. It does not lead her to study his comfort or happiness, apart from her own, Bertie."

"Like a certain wife of my acquaintance, who has spoiled her worthless husband by studying him too much," said Bertie fondly, bending forward to bestow a kiss upon his companion. They were alone in the carriage. "What on earth should I do without you, Kitty? I look to you for help and advice in everything. Come what may you always seem equal to the occasion. To go back to Harold's wife though; we must try to think well of her for Harold's sake."

"She dislikes you, Bertie, so you can't expect me to entertain a very high opinion of her," said Kitty, indignantly. "No, I am not mistaken. The dislike is very carefully veiled, but still it exists. She is jealous of your long-standing friendship with Harold. She does not wish it to go on."

"She will never succeed in coming between us. Our friendship is too firmly knit for that. Kitty, what are we going to do for ready money? My last sovereign went for the tickets, and it is uncertain when Jacobs will send me a remittance."

"I've got ten shillings," said Kitty, promptly, "and I dare say I can get a little more, somehow. Leave it to me, Bertie. The dealers really ought to pay more promptly when you supply them with original ideas that bring in no end of money, and take well with the public."

"They ought," assented her husband, "but they don't and they won't. Perhaps there's a purgatory in store for them somewhere—they richly deserve it. Well, if you think you can manage till next week, Kitty, why, as Mr. Micawber says, 'something may turn up.'"

"I'll try," said Kitty, reassuringly. "You need not worry yourself. Oh, what a delicious week it has been—no bills and no housekeeping! If it could only have gone on for ever!"

CHAPTER III.

In spite of Kitty's good management and her husband's persistent efforts to woo success, things were rapidly going from bad to worse with the young couple. Their little ménage seemed to be under a cloud, and that cloud without the proverbial silver lining.

Bertie had no income beyond that which he derived from his art. True, the cottage was theirs, but, as the sculptor remarked to his wife, three people and a dog could not live upon air, even if they were rent free. Art had not proved a kind mistress to her young disciple. Thus far she had accorded him little fame and less wealth.

The statues upon which all his hopes of future greatness rested remained in the studio unsold.

It harassed him, and prevented him from concentrating his mind upon his work, to think of the unpaid bills gradually increasing in number, and the tax paper upon the mantelpiece inviting his notice, declaring in an aggressive, offensive manner that it must positively be paid within fourteen days after the demand.

The young sculptor's face began to show the traces of disappointment, care, and that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick.

Kitty did her utmost to spare him, but even she could not coin money, clever as she was, and money was badly wanted in order to keep the wheels of the domestic machinery well oiled.

"Perhaps I could do without Jimima," she remarked one day, when the financial question was under discussion. "I shall be sorry to lose her; she is such a willing, good-natured girl, but we really cannot afford to keep her any longer—she must go."

"And I shall have the pleasure of seeing you

cleaning down the doorsteps some fine morning!" retorted Bertie, irritably. "No, Kitty; we must retrace in some other direction—Jimima stays."

"We could have a charwoman, dear, once a week," urged Kitty, heroically, "and the steps could wait until she came."

"I hate charwomen; chattering old-cats, who go from house to house purveying gossip about their various employers. Jimima doesn't do that. I won't allow you to be left without one servant, Kitty, to do the rough work."

When Jimima—a queer-looking girl of twenty with very wide open eyes, as if she were suffering from chronic astonishment at something or other, and eyebrows apparently dragged upwards by the force with which her hair was pulled back from her forehead and fastened in a small, tight knob behind—entered the room bearing the teatray, her remarks proved unintentionally that she had been listening at the keyhole.

"I hope, ma'am, as you'll never think of sending me away at any time," she began, making a fearful noise with the teaspoons, extremely trying to Bertie's nerves. "I've been very comfortable here with you, that I have; and if so be as you and master ain't exactly flourishing just now, why, rather than leave to go among strangers, I'd stay for nothink but my board and lodgin' and let the wages stand over for a while. I couldn't bear the idea of leaving you, ma'am, with nothin' but a weekly charwoman to fall back upon, as would give things a lick and a promise, and want no end of broken victuals to take home with her at night into the bargain. No, mum, Jimima Meeks ain't that sort. She's got a 'art if she is but a servant, and you've won it, all along of being so kind to me. She ain't agoin' to leave you, not even if you give her warnin', which is her first and last word, and hopes you won't take offence, being well meant and—"

Jimima, falling to round off her sentence, made a dash for the door, and retired precipitately to her own region, the kitchen, overcome by her feelings.

"I am afraid Jimima, like the Marchioness, has a weakness for keyholes," said Bertie, with an amused smile. "She must have heard every word we uttered, Kitty. No matter; we have but few secrets, and she is a good, faithful, honest creature. For the present we will allow her to stay upon her own terms. Some day I hope it will be in our power to recompense her."

Even the fact of their servant proving staunch to them, and refusing to leave them in their distress, seemed to infuse a little more hope and courage into the young couple.

As for Jimima she was radiant, having carried her point. She fairly worshipped the young master and mistress, who differed so widely from the "serious," commonplace families she had lived in before.

The bright, pleasant, unconventional atmosphere in which Bertie and Kitty existed, their artistic, half-foreign ways delighted Jimima, accustomed only to dull respectability.

Kitty, as mistress, never forgot to treat her with kindness and consideration. Bertie, when neither irritable nor despondent, had a thousand whimsical sayings and boyish, mirthful actions that excited Jimima's admiration and laughter.

Rather than abandon the young people to the tender mercies of a charwoman she would resign not only her wages, but what, as a maid-of-all-work, she valued even more—her perquisites.

Bertie Randolph was in his studio one morning, putting the finishing touches to an exquisite little statuette intended for the dealers when Jimima entered, bearing a note upon a silver salver.

It was from Mr. Delahaye, a wealthy, eccentric bachelor living in the neighbourhood. He had evinced a great liking for the young sculptor, whose exceptional talent he fully appreciated and admired.

"Come and have some luncheon with me today," ran the note. "I want to introduce you to the Earl of Roxburgh, who is my guest at present. I trust the introduction may prove mutually satisfactory, and advantageous to you, Randolph. The Earl, as you are aware, is no

mean connoisseur, and I intend him to visit your studio before he leaves Chislehurst."

"Oh, Bertie, do go; the Earl may give you a commission!" cried Kitty, eagerly. "At any rate, the little change will do you good."

Bertie made a wry face.

"I don't believe he will do anything of the kind," he said, aggravatingly. "I shall not allow myself to entertain such an idea. I suppose I must go, though, or Delahaye will feel offended."

"Of course you must go, and if the Earl expresses a wish to see your studio so much the better."

"Get the 'shop' in order then, with a view to possible customers," retorted Bertie, sarcastically. "Art, like everything else, has become a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence nowadays. Surely, when Royal Academicians are not above painting pictures intended to advertise the wares of a noted manufacturer, I ought not to mind doing a little houting on my own account! It only requires the poet laureate to write some burning, impassioned verses extolling the merit of patent matches, soap or blacking and the subjugation of art to trade will be complete."

At Mr. Delahaye's Bertie met the Earl of Roxburgh as arranged. He was a tall, thin, elderly man, with a mild, sad, pensive face, and a courteous, perfectly well-bred manner.

Cultivated to the very finger-tips, a famous connoisseur, a judge of sculpture and painting, any work of art upon which the Earl was pleased to set the seal of his approval could not fail to advance and benefit the artist, however obscure he might be, by selling for a large price and attracting public notice.

Upon this occasion the great man had a personal motive for wishing to avail himself of exceptional talent, apart from mere general enthusiasm in the service of art.

He had lately lost his wife, a lovely, amiable woman, much younger than himself, to whom he had been devoted, she fully returning the affection lavished upon her.

Her somewhat sudden death had preyed upon his mind, and unfitted him to mingle in society. The Earl could not become reconciled to the loss he had sustained. One resolve respecting the dead Countess had taken firm hold of him, and engrossed his attention completely, to the exclusion of all other interests.

He would cause a stately mausoleum to be erected to her in the grounds close to his mansion. Neither money nor time should be spared in rendering it as perfect as human art could make it. The best talent at command should be employed upon it. When finished it would stand there for centuries, a magnificent monument for generations of men and women to feast their eyes upon, while keeping fresh and green the memory of the beautiful woman whose untimely death had created such a blank in his life, and led to its being erected.

English and foreign sculptors alike had been applied to by the Earl, who intended the mausoleum to be a marvel of exquisite carving both within and without. But the sketches and designs thus far submitted to him had failed to satisfy his fastidious, exacting requirements.

Not until he found a sculptor after his own heart to undertake the most important work connected with it would the mausoleum begin to arise. The ideal of it existed in the Earl's mind, yet he sought in vain for the archetype in the outer world. As yet no one sculptor had succeeded in bringing it under his notice.

Having ascertained Bertie Randolph's profession from his host, Mr. Delahaye, the Earl, in course of conversation, expressed a desire to visit the young man's studio. Not that he had any idea of employing him upon the mausoleum, but from a kindly wish to please and if possible, benefit the young sculptor by offering him some less important commission; the Earl having gathered from his host that Bertie's means were of the slightest, while his talent was considerable.

The poor fellow had endeavoured to be cynical, to deny himself the luxury of hope, usually accounted a cheap one, but in reality

dear, since the high price of disappointment has so often to be paid for it. Yet when he knew that the Earl actually contemplated a visit to his studio the next morning, when he thought of the mausoleum, his heart beat rapidly; the old ambitions, the old dreams of wealth and fame, came thronging back to him. He had built a dozen stately castles in the air ere he rejoined the expectant Kitty.

"The Earl is coming here to-morrow morning, dearest," he said, earnestly enough, without any sarcasm this time. "His visit may be productive of nothing, but there is just the hope of an alternative. I want you to see him. I think I never met a more perfect specimen of a thoroughbred English gentleman."

"I told you he would come," cried Kitty, triumphantly, standing on tiptoe to give her husband a kiss when she had heard all about the mausoleum. "Oh, Bertie, I am so glad! I don't want to be unfeeling about the poor Earl's bereavement," she added, soberly; "but how strange it would seem if a great happiness were to arise for us out of his sorrow, if he entrusted the mausoleum to you! And you are capable of undertaking such a work."

"You are a goose, always overrating my limited abilities," said Bertie, now on his hands and knees groping for a portfolio that contained some sketches, among them being a design for a mausoleum that had dawdled upon him months ago. How bright and glad and changed for the better he seemed already, thought Kitty! The mere hope of success awaiting him in the future endowed him with fresh strength and vigour!

She was up early the next morning, bent upon making Bertie's little studio assume a favourable appearance ere the important visitor arrived.

Some old velvet hangings shaded the windows, and threw rich splashes of colour upon the nude limbs of the exquisitely wrought statues; china bowls, containing great masses of scented bloom, stood about upon brackets and tables. As for Jennina, she swept and scrubbed with indomitable energy, feeling half-inclined to find fault with the very sunbeams that streamed in through the studio windows for being dusty.

The Earl, whose manner at once set Kitty at ease—it was so genial and kindly—examined the contents of the studio with critical enjoyment, not unmingled with surprise.

He had hardly expected anything so good. The creations that surrounded him were perfect in their delicacy of finish and sympathetic rendering. More especially was he pleased with a recumbent form in a boat, as yet unfinished, and to which the sculptor had given the name of "The Lady of Shalott."

"That is very lovely!" he said, gazing upon the upturned marble face, so full of unconscious pathos, the parted lips seeming to breathe. "A recumbent statue of the Countess will occupy the centre of the mausoleum I propose building. The pose of your figure, Mr. Randolph, could hardly be excelled for grace and beauty of line. I have seen nothing to equal it as yet."

The bas-reliefs and the sketches submitted to him by the sculptor went to strengthen the opinion of his merits already formed. When the Earl went away he carried with him the design for a mausoleum, and the "Lady of Shalott" had found a purchaser.

"You will hear from me very shortly," he said, when taking leave of the sculptor and his wife. "I cannot decide at once upon anything so important; but your conception has come nearer to fulfilling my requirements from an artistic point of view than any others. I think you are capable of interpreting my dream in marble, Mr. Randolph! Mind, I make no definite promise, but you shall hear from me shortly one way or the other."

The Earl was a keen judge of character. Glancing from the slim, boyish husband to the pretty girl-wife he read their story aright, and pitied them accordingly.

"Married first, and looked round afterwards to ascertain how they were to live," he thought compassionately; "the old story. And they are still in love with each other. Perhaps on that account they are the less to be pitied."

When he had gone Kitty threw her arms

round her husband's neck, and kissed him wildly.

"Oh! you dear old boy, your fortune is made!" she exclaimed, half laughing, half crying. "The fame of the mausoleum will last you as long as you live. It will bear witness to your talent, while it keeps the memory of the poor beautiful Countess fresh in men's minds—a double monument, destined to render famous both the living and the dead."

CHAPTER IV.

THE Earl of Roxburgh, with ample means at his command, could hardly enter into or realise Bertie Randolph's feelings with regard to the mausoleum.

Such a work, entrusted to him by such a man, would bring the sculptor into prominent notice. It would win for him both fame and fortune. And although he was upon the verge of insolvency, Bertie was true artist enough to desire fame before every other consideration.

There would be no more pinching and screwing, sordid anxieties would no longer come between him and the work that grew beneath his hand. Life for Kitty and himself would assume a new and delightful aspect. Already he seemed to have shaken hands with disappointment across an ever-widening gulf, and said good-bye to that dreariest of companions.

Ideas for the mausoleum came flooding into his mind. He began to make the recumbent figure in clay, and to prepare the allegorical bas-reliefs for the walls.

Kitty, seeing him thus absorbed, living, as it were in anticipation of the Earl's letter, forgetful of the possibility of disappointment, became alarmed.

She was very sanguine herself, but she did not lose sight of the fact, when the first excitement was over, that the Earl might decide in favour of some other sculptor. In that case, how would Bertie, so sensitive, so easily depressed or elated, bear the cruel reaction, for which he was wholly unprepared!

"Bertie, dear, I think you will be wise not to build too much upon the Earl's word," she said, gently, when the subject that interested them both so deeply had again cropped up. "Great men are proverbially fickle and uncertain. The Earl may change his mind, or see some design which pleases him better than yours. Better to recognise the possibility of disappointment than to be wholly unprepared for it."

He turned upon her for the first time since their marriage in anger.

"What do you mean, Kitty?" he demanded. "You ought to be the last to dash my hopes of success to the ground. I tell you I dare not contemplate disappointment after this. It would kill me! I could not take up my life as it existed before the Earl came, to return to the old drudgery, the never-ceasing worries, unredeemed by any prospect of success and prosperity ahead. It was hardly bearable then, it would be intolerable now. Of course he will not fall me. Did he not express himself pleased, satisfied, with my work! How can you be so absurd!"

"I only feared the disappointment for you, dear, in case of failure," faltered Kitty, her dark eyes brimming with tears, her pretty mobile mouth quivering; "and I did not think you could speak so unkindly to me!"

"I'm a brute, and you're the dearest wife living!" exclaimed Bertie, smitten with sudden compunction. "Don't cry, Kitty; I didn't mean to be so unkind; but the mere suggestion of failure or rejection turns me cold. I dread it as much on your account as my own. We are like children, frightening ourselves with shadows. Success, not disappointment, awaits us in the immediate future. When once the broad sunshine of prosperity streams down upon us we shall be able to laugh at the fears which haunt us now."

He threw his arm round her as he spoke, and kissed her tenderly. His handsome, boyish face was radiant with hope and confidence, that somehow impregnated Kitty, and chased away all her gloomy forebodings.

Presently she was helping him to build bright castles in the air, castles in which even Jennina and Jack, the collie, had a place.

"By-the-by, I haven't written to Harold, lately," said Bertie, taking off his blouse and resuming his coat. "The dear old fellow will be glad to learn that I have met with a stroke of luck at last. I'll write to him to-night, and tell him about the Earl."

Acting upon the impulse of the moment, he sat down and wrote a glowing letter to Harold Fontagne, informing him of the Earl's intentions with regard to the mausoleum, and the reasonable presumption that he would be selected to execute that work of art so far as the sculpture was concerned, touching lightly upon the satisfaction such a prospect had afforded him.

Harold Fontagne was from home when that letter reached his residence. Cynthia, in a more discontented mood than usual, opened it. All her listlessness vanished as she read Bertie's letter, giving place to passionate indignation and bitter envy.

She recognised the importance of the news it contained; that such a success as Bertie Randolph anticipated enjoying must bring many others in its train. Why, oh, why! had such a stroke of good luck fallen to his share instead of Harold's, she wondered, angrily. Harold, who had genius, whereas Bertie was merely clever and talented.

The old dislike and jealousy entertained towards Bertie gathered fresh force in her breast. According to his own account he had been making fair progress when he came to visit them.

Now this chance of distinguishing himself, this chance of a thousand, which might place him at the head of his profession, had been accorded him.

And Harold's progress was so slow, so wretchedly slow. He had not succeeded as yet in winning for his beautiful, queenly wife the social position she longed to fill. Oh! it was hard that things should be thus arranged.

Cynthia Fontagne fairly hated her husband's friend, as he paced up and down the flower-scented drawing-room, a restless, angry look in her dark, sombre eyes.

Disappointment might overtake Bertie yet, she reflected. The Earl of Roxburgh had not actually authorised him to commence working upon the mausoleum.

Ah! what was that thought which flashed suddenly through her mind, and took away her breath—it was so bold and audacious!

Why give that letter to Harold at all? Why not burn it, and induce him to bring his own work under the Earl's notice! It was certain to outshine Bertie's.

If inquiries were ever made it would be easy to say the letter had never been delivered at Richmond. No suspicion would attach to her in the matter. The Earl had not decided yet as to the sculptor he would employ. Harold might carry off the palm and enjoy the success she so earnestly desired for him.

Once let him read that letter, and the case would be hopeless. He would never consent to enter the lists against Bertie Randolph, his dearest friend, to commit a mean, dishonourable act.

But if he were allowed to remain in ignorance of Bertie's dealings with the Earl he might be induced to enter the lists then. And Cynthia could say that she had gained her information respecting the mausoleum to be erected from a society journal.

She knew the dangerous nature of the game she contemplated playing. Her husband's anger, should the deceit ever stand exposed, would be terrible, yet she determined to risk it rather than allow such an opportunity of advancing his fortunes to slip by her. Harold was her idol, her king amongst men. What would she not do or dare when he was in question!

He loved her too well not to refuse her forgiveness should he ever learn the truth respecting that love-prompted sin. And Cynthia did not intend him to recognise the dishonourable nature of the act she wished him to commit. A little prudence and discretion, a little sacrifice of

honour and principle on her part in order to compass a great end, and the thing would be done.

Without giving herself time to reflect, lest she should lose her courage, Cynthia tore Bertie Randolph's letter into forty pieces. She could not burn them at once, since there was no fire in the grate, and she would not ring for a candle to excite comment among the servants.

Going upstairs she locked the pieces in her dressing-case with a gully, uncomfortable feeling. Hitherto, although she had been proud, passionate, self-indulgent, no act of deliberate wrong-doing had marred Cynthia's life. The destruction of the letter was, she knew, a kind of crime, and it gave her an odd sensation of mingled fear, defiance, and remorse.

When Harold came home his wife met him, her splendid eyes aglow with suppressed excitement, a lovely carnation warming the pale olive of her cheek.

"Harold, you must put yourself in communication with the Earl of Roxburgh," she said, eagerly, when she had told her false story. "He must see your work before he arrives at any decision!"

"Where did you obtain your information, Cynthia?" he inquired, wondering a little at her unusual fire and energy.

"Oh, I saw it in a society journal—I forget which—while waiting in Mrs. Jerningham's drawing-room this morning. I thought of you at once. The mausoleum would make your future, and add to your reputation as a sculptor, Harold!"

"You have been out paying visits then? I thought you had a headache, and intended to stay at home!"

"The headache got better, and I owed Mrs. Jerningham a call," said Cynthia, already beginning to understand that one lie requires many more to cover it.

"Jack Fortescue knows the Earl, and Jack would do anything for me," remarked Harold Fontagne, thoughtfully. "I might sound him upon the subject if there is any truth in what you have read, Cynthia, and Jack can manage an introduction; there may be a chance for me. I am not doing so well that I can afford to feel indifferent about doing better. I wonder if the Earl is in town now?"

"I believe he is, but we can soon ascertain. When will you see Jack Fortescue?"

"At the club to-day, most likely. Don't be too sanguine, Cynthia. The mausoleum may have been evolved from the inner consciousness of the editor of the journal in question. And even if I meet the Earl I cannot deliberately throw myself at his head, or cry my own wares, supposing him to be really in search of an eminent sculptor."

"I think you will meet him," said Cynthia, regarding her husband fondly and proudly; "and if success should follow you will owe it to me."

"What do I not owe to you, darling?" he exclaimed, pressing her face against his own. "Few men can boast of possessing such a wife. Love, honour, happiness, each and all are safe in your keeping."

Had the words been knives they could hardly have stabbed her more sharply. Was she not plotting against his honour, doing her best and her worst to render him unconsciously false to it? But it was too late now to draw back. She must go on with what she had begun.

Harold Fontagne contrived to see Jack Fortescue that day. From him he ascertained that Cynthia's news was perfectly correct. The Earl of Roxburgh did contemplate erecting a splendid mausoleum to the memory of his late wife, although as yet he had failed to come across a sculptor capable of embodying his idea.

"I believe he's half cracked, you know," remarked Jack Fortescue confidently. "He's never been the same man since his wife's death. Introduces you, of course I will. He belongs to the Carlton, and he goes there sometimes. It's about the only place he hasn't given up. We shall catch him one of these fine days, and I'll give him no peace till he has visited your studio. Since he's bent upon wasting money on an

exaggerated tombstone—what else can you call a mausoleum, pray!—why shouldn't you benefit by it?"

Jack was a Pallistine, and an utter barbarian from an æsthetic standpoint, but he kept his word to Harold Fontagne. He effected an introduction between the sculptor and the Earl, while he sang Harold's praises to the latter when he was not present, and lauded him up to the skies as a rising genius, whose work had already obtained substantial recognition.

The Earl's interest was sufficiently aroused by these representations to induce him to visit Harold's studio. What he saw there enabled him to arrive at once to a decision. The grandeur and daring originality of conception, the force and power, in which Bertie Randolph's work was lacking, combined with delicacy and refinement of execution, were the qualifications which the Earl most desired to avail himself of in a sculptor. To such a man as Harold Fontagne, he might safely intrust the mausoleum, confident that the result would realise his utmost expectations.

Ere he left the studio the important commission that bade fair to render the sculptor famous had been given to Harold Fontagne. The execution of it would employ him for many months to come, rendering him quite independent of the dealers already.

"I owe this to you, Cynthia," he said, gratefully, kissing his beautiful wife. "Unless you had brought it under my notice I should have known nothing of the Earl's intention. I can't imagine which paper you read the announcement in! The Earl detests all society journals, it appears, and endeavours to keep his affairs strictly private. He was not aware that any publicity had attended his design, respecting the mausoleum."

"I forget which paper I read the paragraph in," said Cynthia, stooping down to arrange some flowers. "It may have been one or the other; but it really doesn't matter. You have got the commission, Harold; that is the most important consideration."

"Bertie will be glad when he hears of it," replied her husband. "I must run down and pay him a visit one of these days. I'm afraid he is not making the progress he would have us imagine. I may be able to employ him upon the mausoleum."

Cynthia said nothing to this; a feeling of remorse and compunction embittered the joy that Harold's success afforded her.

It would be a cruel disappointment for Bertie Randolph; but then he need never learn how it had been brought about, and Harold as he ascended would not fail to extend a helping hand to his friend, thus unconsciously atoning for the unconscious wrong he had done him.

She had only to adhere to her story that the letter had never been received in order to screen herself from exposure and blame, and she really would do her utmost, indirectly, to compensate the young couple whose budding hopes she had ruthlessly blighted.

CHAPTER V.

At Chislehurst the Randolphs were awaiting the Earl's reply with daily increasing anxiety.

Bertie had finished the "Lady of Shalott," and forwarded it to its purchaser. He had received a cheque for it through the great man's secretary, but no decisive answer with regard to the mausoleum came to set his heart at rest.

He neglected his work for the dealers, which would have brought him in a little money, and devoted himself to perfecting the beautiful recumbent statue intended for the mausoleum.

When Kitty remonstrated and reminded him that it might be only labour lost, he became so passionate and unreasonable that she wisely left him to do as he thought best. Already she was beginning to regret the Earl's visit, to hate the very name of the mausoleum.

The constant suspense in which they existed, Bertie's haggard face, and uncertain temper, were worse evils than poverty. What if disappointment awaited him, if his hopes had been

raised so high only to be dashed to the ground again! How would he bear the terrible reaction! Kitty wondered fearfully.

There were times when the young sculptor was as sweet-tempered, as hopeful as ever; but even his wife could not realise the intensity of feeling, the agonised hope, alternating with darkest despair, that tortured him while awaiting the Earl's decision.

Kitty did not possess the creative gift with its ambitious yearnings, its impatience under obscurity and neglect, its desire to be understood and appreciated. Consequently, loving and devoted as she was, she could hardly enter into Bertie's sufferings, although she pitied him sincerely.

He had staked his all upon that one throw, as it were. If he lost he would never have the courage to make another attempt.

Day after day he watched and waited for the postman, exchanging no remark with Kitty when the wretch went whistling by, only turning moodily away from the window, while her eyes followed him sadly.

Sometimes, which was rather worse, he came to the house with letters, raising expectations doomed only to be disappointed. The communications were either for Jimina from some of her numerous lovers, or friendly epistles, pleasant enough to receive, but incapable of compensating the young pair for the much-desired business letter that failed to arrive.

Bertie's face grew wan and haggard, his blue eyes had a wistful look in them that often made Kitty's heart ache.

"He said he would write soon," observed the young man for the fiftieth time. "Surely the letter has not failed to reach us, Kitty!"

"Letters so seldom miss," she replied, with a sigh. "Why should that particular one have gone wrong? No, Bertie, it will come in time if we only have patience. A man occupying the Earl's position must have many things to engross his attention. We forget that in our anxiety."

"Can you manage for the present without any more money?" asked Bertie, before quitting the room. "Until this is settled I cannot devote myself to the production of 'pot-bollers,' Kitty. I feel too restless."

"I think I can go on for another fortnight," she said, cheerfully. "At any rate, I must try. It is not the lack of money but your changed looks that worry me most, dear!"

"Oh, I shall be all right when once I have heard from the Earl," he replied, as if a favourable answer were inevitable. But the confidence was only assumed, and it did not deceive Kitty.

She was really growing very short of money, although she would not tell Bertie so to add to his anxiety. The Earl's cheque had gone to pay accounts of long standing, leaving her but little to go on with.

Butcher and baker and candlestick-maker were fast losing their urbanity, and becoming urgent in their demands for payment.

Kitty had these worries to contend with, in addition to the suspense respecting the Earl's decision, and the nervous pitiable condition to which it had reduced Bertie.

She was in the kitchen one day, enveloped in a big lace-edged holland apron making a tart, Jimina's pastry being of a leathery, substantial kind which Bertie failed to appreciate, when the postman's quick, impatient knock sent the blood flying to her heart. What news had he brought them this time, she wondered.

"Master had taken the letters out of the box before I got there, ma'am," said Jimina, predicting herself downstairs again in her usual headlong fashion. "He's in the dining-room a reading of them."

Jimina knew that her master and mistress were anxiously awaiting the arrival of some important letter, and she was on tiptoe to ascertain if it had actually arrived.

Repressing a childish desire to run upstairs at once to learn the best or the worst, Kitty finished her tart somehow, hurried it into the oven, and then, having washed her hands, felt that she was free to leave the kitchen without any loss of dignity.

As she entered the tiny dining-room a subdued

exclamation escaped her, a terrified expression shone in her dark eyes. Hurriedly crossing the room, she flung herself down beside the easy-chair in which Bertie was sitting.

"Bertie, darling! Oh, what is the matter!" she cried, wildly. "Speak to me! tell me what you have heard! I cannot bear to see you look so heart-broken! Try, for my sake, to rouse yourself! Is it a letter from the Earl?"

Bertie nodded. He was lying back in the easy-chair, one nerveless hand still grasping an open letter, a vacant, stricken look clouding his fair, handsome face. On the floor beside him lay a large, square envelope, bearing a coronet. The sculptor had the appearance of a man suffering from the effects of a terrible blow.

"He refuses to avail himself of my services; or, rather, regrets his inability to do so!" said Bertie, with a sob in his voice; "and I owe this to Harold Fontagne. Kitty, he has played me false; he has obtained the commission that would have saved us from ruin! The Earl intends to employ him upon the mausoleum; and he would have known nothing of it but for my letter. He must, upon receiving that, have brought himself under the Earl's notice at once; and I would have trusted him with my life! May Heaven forgive him for this piece of treachery—it has broken my heart!"

"Impossible! Harold Fontagne cannot have acted so basely to his dearest friend!" cried Kitty, with flashing eyes. "Even if he were mean enough to envy you the success you anticipated, surely his sense of honour would have prevented him from diverting it away from you to himself! There must be some mistake!"

"There is no mistake. His work is superior to mine in some respects, and I suppose he thought it fair to compete with me for such an important commission. And I, deeming him to be the soul of honour—incapable of forestalling another man, and that man his dearest friend—laid bare all my hopes to him, and he has not scrupled to advance himself at my expense. Read the letter, that will tell you all. The Earl admits that this acquaintance with Mr. Fontagne is of very recent date. What further proof do you want of his treachery? I could have borne the disappointment—the loss—but this blow, coming from such an unexpected quarter! Oh, Harold! Harold!"

In the excitement Bertie's voice had risen almost to a scream; the stunned look had vanished, giving place to a fit of violent anger.

"Curse him!" cried the young fellow, wildly; "curse him for a false friend, who has come between me and the one redeeming chance to which I cling. Who would have thought him capable of such an act? Not I, Kitty, or I should not have poured out my heart so freely to him, poor candid fool that I was! But he shall not go unpunished. Men shall know him for what he is—a knave, a swindler. I will—"

A bright crimson stream spouted from his lips and choked his utterance, as he fell forward suddenly upon the carpet. Bertie Randolph had broken a blood-vessel!

Between them, the affrighted women lifted him on to the sofa. Then Jimma ran for a doctor; while Kitty, beside herself with grief and passionate, burning indignation, strove to check that terrible flow of blood, and restore her husband to consciousness.

Looking at Bertie when he had been transferred from the sofa to his own room, the doctor knew that his hours were numbered. His sensitive, impressionable temperament, worn by long suspense and anxiety, would never rally from the shock it had sustained. In his case, the restless, ever-working mind had proved too much for the frail body.

The doctor lacked the courage requisite to inform Kitty that her husband had received his death-blow. He would not answer the mute, imploring question in the young wife's tearful eyes.

"Mr. Randolph has broken down under severe mental strain of some kind," he said, gravely. "Perfect quiet and the absence of all excitement are necessary in order to prolong his life. At present the case is a very serious one; I cannot

hold out much hope. Perhaps you would like to consult another medical man?"

"Yes; he must have the best advice," said Kitty mechanically, as she stood by the bed. "As you remarked, he has had a great deal to trouble him lately, and some bad news contained in a letter brought on this attack. He is so young, though; surely he will—he must recover!"

"He may," replied the doctor, despising himself for being such a coward.

But this young wife's silent anguish affected him far more than any lavish display of tears and protestations. He could not extinguish her last hope, fallacious as it was.

Bertie recovered consciousness, and lay there too weak to talk, too weary of life to make an effort in order to retain it.

Only when Kitty sat beside him holding his hand did he rally a little, while the ghost of a smile crept into the blue eyes, once so expressive of hope and love and happiness.

Hope and happiness had deserted the sculptor and his wife. Only love remained faithful to them, and drew them closer to each other as the dark angel's footsteps cross their threshold.

Kitty never left her husband. Once Jimma entering the room on tiptoe, her eyes red and swollen with weeping, found the brown head and the golden one asleep upon the same pillow.

Worn out with fatigue Kitty had dozed off as she sat by the bedside, and Jimma, seeing that all was right with the patient, forbore to awake her.

"Don't let Fontagne know of my illness," whispered Bertie during the night. "I'll try to forgive him as I hope to be forgiven; but I'd rather not see him again, Kitty. The Fontagne that I loved and trusted is dead, or, rather, he never existed. What time I have remaining is sacred to you. Oh, my darling, it is so hard to leave you! You are the one link that still binds me to earth, and we had planned out such a long, happy, prosperous life. Well, Heaven knows best; but it is a great mystery."

He need not have requested Kitty to keep his illness a secret from Harold Fontagne. Believing, as she did now, that Harold had acted treacherously towards her husband, that he was the cause of his illness, and would shortly be the cause of his death, she hated him with an intensity that gathered fresh force every day.

Harold, the false, the perfidious, was strong, prosperous, likely to enjoy life for many years to come. Bertie—her Bertie—who had never been guilty of a dishonourable thought or act, lay there a broken-hearted, unsuccessful, dying man, the victim of his friend's treachery.

Surely there must be something radically wrong somewhere since such things were permitted to exist, thought Kitty, bitterly. She send for Harold Fontagne? No, not unless it were to reproach him for his perfidy over the dead body of the man he had helped to kill.

Cynthia was finishing an exquisite little water-colour sketch one day, when Harold Fontagne dashed into the room in a state of intense excitement.

"I've just heard from a fellow who knows him that Bertie Randolph is seriously ill," he exclaimed. "What can Kitty be thinking of not to send for me! I'm off to Chislehurst at once, to find out what is the matter with the dear old fellow. Put me a few things together in a bag, Cynthia; I may not return to-night. I can't understand Kitty's silence."

Cynthia turned suddenly cold and faint. Bertie Randolph ill! Had her cleverly managed deceit and the disappointment it had entailed upon him anything to do with his illness? If so, would the shameful truth leak out when the two men were together?

"Why not telegraph, and wait for the answer?" she said, nervously. "Mr. Randolph's illness may have been exaggerated, Harold."

"Bertie would hardly adopt such a course if I were reported ill," said Harold, sharply. "I don't think you ever quite understood the nature of our friendship, Cynthia, or you would know better than to offer such a suggestion. Bertie is more to me than a brother."

Without another word Cynthia went to pack her husband's bag, feeling miserably appre-

hensive of coming evil. Oh! what a relief it would be to learn that Bertie's illness was in no wise connected with the mausoleum. To know that she had not only caused him grievous disappointment, but illness also, would be an unpleasant reflection, apart from the dread of her deceitful conduct standing exposed.

The subject of the mausoleum was sure to be alluded to when the friends met. Perhaps, after all, Bertie Randolph had not allowed it to occupy his mind so exclusively as she, Cynthia, imagined. It was her guilty conscience that supplied these disquieting fears. Should the missing letter be inquired for she must profess complete ignorance respecting it. It was the only course left open to her if she would escape detection.

"Don't be long away," she said earnestly, clinging to Harold ere he left her, as if loth to let him go. "I cannot bear to be parted from you, even for a few hours, dearest."

He kissed her, but it was with a preoccupied air. His thoughts were evidently dwelling upon Bertie Randolph; he was longing to reach him.

"Will he come back to me as he went, without any change?" thought Cynthia, roaming restlessly from room to room throughout that miserable day. "Oh! if I had not interfered, and allowed matters to take their course! I should have escaped this torturing dread; I should have been exempt from all reproach and fear of discovery. At such a price, even success is too dearly bought!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Harold Fontagne reached Ivy Cottage, the Randolphs' residence, Bertie lay at the point of death. It was summer time, and the windows of his room had been thrown wide open, to admit the languid, flower-scented breeze.

"Take my card to your mistress," said the sculptor, when he had ascertained his friend's extreme condition from poor faithful, distressed Jimma. "I know she will see me. I am Mr. Randolph's oldest friend."

Thus urged, Jimma took the card. Kitty, who was bending over her husband, in a kind of dumb agony, received it mechanically. Then seeing the name inscribed upon it she flung the card from her as if it had been a venomous serpent.

"Tell Mr. Fontagne that I refuse to see him, that I consider his presence here at such a time an insult," she said, in an imperious whisper; "tell him to go!"

Jimma departed, wondering not a little at the exceptional nature of the message she had to convey. She did not attempt to tone it down, however, in repeating it to Harold Fontagne. Why did he come bothering there where he wasn't wanted at such a time? thought Jimma, indignantly; taking, as she imagined, her cue from her mistress.

"An insult!" said Harold Fontagne, to himself, in all amazement; then aloud, "There must be some mistake. Your mistress cannot understand who it is that wishes to see her!"

"Yes, she does, sir, beggin' your pardon," said Jimma curtly. "She mentioned your name when she gave me that there message."

"Where is she?"

"Upstairs along with the master, who may die at any moment. It ain't a time for payin' visits," exclaimed the girl, in a postscript of her own, exasperated by the strange gentleman's pertinacity.

"I will go up, then. I must see your master again. Until this morning I did not know that he was ill."

Jimma planted herself in the doorway to prevent forcible ingress. Harold Fontagne put her aside as if she had been a feather, and walked quietly upstairs, full of grief and astonishment.

The door of Bertie's room stood open; as Harold Fontagne entered, hat in hand, Kitty suddenly confronted him.

"How dare you?" she whispered, her dark eyes flashing fire, her small form dilating.

"Would you distress his last moments by forcing yourself upon him. Have you not done him harm enough already?"

He gazed at her in all astonishment. Had her grief driven Kitty mad?

"Kitty," he said, in a tone of sorrowful reproach. "You can speak thus to me, his dearest friend! What have I done to deserve it? Why have you not informed me of Bertie's illness. I have only just heard of it. I came without losing a minute. I would have been here long ago had you sent for me."

"Was it likely that I should send for you when it is you who have killed him!" said the young wife, passionately. "Do not add hypocrisy to your other shortcomings, Harold Fontagne. Bertie does not wish to see you; he prayed me to keep you from approaching him. If you have any human feeling left in you go—and leave us alone."

"What have I done that I should be treated thus!" he demanded, still in doubt as to Kitty's sanity. "I have had no quarrel with Bertie. You say that I have killed him. Kitty! are you mad?"

"No, or I should suffer less. You robbed him of the work upon which he had set his heart, you abused his generous confidence in you, and this is the result. You have killed him in the most cowardly way imaginable, and I—"

Roused from his stupor by the sound of voices, Bertie looked up and recognised Harold Fontagne.

"You promised to keep him away," he said, addressing Kitty, who had hastened back to him; "and he is here."

"Go, I implore you, go," murmured the girl. "Do not agitate him. Can you not see that he is dying?"

Harold Fontagne, instead of complying, fell on his knees by the bedside. Strong man as he was, the tears ran down his face like rain.

"Bertie, dear old friend," he pleaded. "For Heaven's sake tell me what I have done to estrange you from me! I am conscious of no fault, no breach in our friendship of my making. At least let me know in what I have sinned against you! I would freely give my life could I but restore you to health and strength again by so doing."

He had clasped one of Bertie's thin, white hands in his own strong, brown ones. The dying man regarded him fixedly, as if a new idea were gradually dawning upon him.

"We must forget and forgive; it is too late for anything else now, Harold," he said, feebly. "I suppose the temptation was too much for you, only I had always thought you superior to such temptation. When I wrote telling you that the Earl of Roxburgh had well-nigh decided to employ me upon the mausoleum to be erected in his grounds, I little thought you would avail yourself of this information to step in before me, and rob me of the commission I stood so much in need of. The knowledge that you were even capable of such an act, the disappointment and disillusion, have killed me. Could you have foreseen this result, I think, I believe, you would have acted differently."

The last sentence was spoken interrogatively, as if he would fain receive some assurance, some expression of penitence, that would enable him to recover a fragment of the old firm faith in Harold's friendship. He was not prepared, though, for what followed.

"Bertie, old man, I declare solemnly that I never received such a letter as the one you mention," said Harold Fontagne, in hushed, earnest tones. "I was not aware that you had ever met the Earl until this moment, or that you entertained any hope of being engaged upon the mausoleum. I would have cut off my right hand rather than have come between you and the object of your desire had I known of this. Surely our long friendship should have taught you to regard me as incapable of such conduct! I swear that your letter never reached me, that I am innocent of any wilful attempt to supersede you in the Earl's opinion and favour. Do you believe me or not?"

"I do."

Bertie's fair face glowed with sudden joy as

he turned it towards his friend till it looked like the face of an angel. He was not reluctant to accept Harold's explanation, or slow to believe it. His pure high nature rejoiced in the fact of the other's innocence being proved.

"Dear old fellow, I am so glad!" he said, slowly. "It hurt me awfully to think that you had deliberately set yourself to ruin my last hope of success. As you say, I ought to have known you better. At least we shall part good friends, with the misunderstanding cleared up. That letter must have been lost in transit. Don't fret, Harold; my faith in you is as firm as ever."

"It won't bring you back to life, though," said Harold, hoarsely, "and indirectly I have caused your death."

"I don't think under any circumstances I should have lived very long—I never had much stamina. Look after Kitty when I'm gone, Harold. She will be very lonely, poor child. I'm so thankful you came now. You can't tell what a load you have lifted from off me. I can die in peace."

They sat beside him for the next hour, until his release came, and the fair boyish features assumed an expression of ineffable rest and solemn mystery. Harold Fontagne broke down altogether, and sobbed like a child. Kitty's eyes were dry and tearless as she pressed her lips to those cold unresponsive ones, and smoothed the way hair back from off her husband's forehead.

"Kitty, you do not think now that it was my fault—that I sinned against him of deliberate intention!" asked the sculptor. "He believed my story, and dying men see clearly. Will you not also forgive me?"

She stood erect, regarding him calmly and coldly.

"I was full of anger against you only a few hours ago," she said, "but now, after what has passed, I believe you were Bertie's true, faithful friend; that you never consciously wronged him. At the same time I am certain that letter was not lost. You may have been from home when it arrived. In that case your wife would probably open it. She never liked Bertie; she was always jealous of the friendship existing between you, and in that letter he alluded in such glowing terms to the work he hoped to obtain. I leave you to draw your own inferences from my words."

A light broke suddenly upon Harold Fontagne's bewilderment; a terrible light, illuminating the past, while it rendered the future dark by comparison.

Was it not Cynthia who had first brought the Earl's project with regard to the mausoleum under his notice? How strangely excited she had seemed when she informed him of it, and besought him to lose no time in obtaining an introduction to the Earl! And she had never been able to tell him the name of the particular journal in which, as she declared, she had read the paragraph relating to the mausoleum! Had she—but the idea was so horrible, so overwhelming, that he dared not contemplate it.

"For Heaven's sake be careful what you say," he exclaimed, fiercely. "You are bringing a serious charge against my wife, in whom I have perfect confidence. Why should she withhold or destroy that letter instead of handing it over to me?"

"That she might keep Bertie's hopes a secret from you, being aware that you would never dream of entering into a professional rivalry with your dearest friend," said Kitty, firmly; "that she might incite you to compete for such a desirable commission yourself, since the Earl's decision was still in abeyance. The desire to advance your interests would be paramount with her, loving you as she does blindly and passionately. I have not studied Mrs. Fontagne's character to no purpose. Who, may I ask, first brought the subject under your notice?"

"Cynthia—my wife!" he replied, with a stifled groan.

"The letter should have reached you upon a Thursday four weeks ago," mentioning the date.

"Were you at home on that day? Try to remember."

"I was absent from home on the day you mention. I did not return till evening," he said, after a brief pause. "Your suspicions may not be unfounded. What it costs me to admit this you will never know. I shall question my wife respecting poor Bertie's letter, which I failed to receive. If she has tampered with it, and willfully deceived me, my wedded happiness will be as much at an end as yours. Dear as Cynthia is to me I will never live with her again. From that hour we part."

The words were quietly spoken, but weighted with a pitiless purpose, an unswerving decision, that awed Kitty in spite of her sorrow and indignation.

"I may be mistaken," she began. "I do not wish to be unjust or—"

"I hope for her sake and mine, that you are mistaken," he interrupted, sternly; "but should your conjecture prove correct she will not go unpunished for her sin, reflecting as it does upon myself."

Then he went away, promising to return for the funeral, and Kitty was left alone with the dead.

Cynthia Fontagne glanced almost wildly at her husband's face when he rejoined her that evening to ascertain how much or how little he knew.

"Is—Mr. Randolph better, Harold?" she faltered, timidly, caressing the toy terrier upon her lap with trembling hand.

"He is dead!" said Harold Fontagne, standing before her, his handsome face set and rigid, a steely light gleaming in his cold grey eyes. "You may congratulate yourself upon having killed him. Cynthia, what did you do with that letter of his which you kept back from me?"

She looked up in sudden horror, the denial she would fain have uttered frozen upon her lips. His glance fascinated her; she could not evade it, although it was reading her guilty soul like a book.

His assumption that she had really received the letter cut the ground from under her feet. Moreover, the news of Bertie's death had stunned her, and confused all her faculties.

Bertie dead, and her secret for promoting Harold's interests at his friend's expense discovered! The end of all things had arrived for her, thought Cynthia, wildly. Would she from out this wreck of her life succeed in saving what she most valued and clung to—namely, her husband's love!

The gulls, the remorse, and late repentance, mingled with fear that blanched her beautiful face, deprived Harold Fontagne of his last lingering belief in her innocence.

"You did receive it, then?" he said, slowly. "Cynthia, what devil prompted you to conceal it, to come to me with that lying story upon your lips! Your deceit, your shameless, dishonourable conduct, has cost Bertie Randolph his life. It will cost me what I value far more than life. I could have forgiven a great deal to you; but that you should persuade me to act in a manner calculated to injure Bertie Randolph that your own pride and ambition might be gratified, conscious all the while that I should recoil in horror from such a proceeding if I understood it aright. To place the weapon in my hand with which to stab my friend to the heart, carefully concealing its deadly nature from me—I cannot forgive this. Only a woman could have conceived and carried out such a refinement of cruelty and baseness! Cynthia, we must part."

She uttered a little cry, and flung herself at his feet as these words fell upon her ear, her hands upraised in piteous entreaty.

"Harold, husband, forgive me, do not send me from you," she moaned. "Am I not sufficiently punished already in the knowledge that I helped to cause Bertie's Randolph's death! Will it not haunt me as long as I live! Oh! love, love, have some pity upon me! It was for your sake I yielded to the temptation. Bertie was prospering, and you seemed to make such slow progress. Had I loved you less this sin would not have stained my soul."

"Such love is more deadly in its effects than hatred," he replied, pitilessly; no line in his stern face relaxing. The iron side of her husband's nature, in which she had refused to

believe, was being revealed to Cynthia now. "Boris, far from prospering, was upon the verge of ruin, and your action completed his downfall," he continued. "I cannot, as I said before, live with you after this proof of your unscrupulous ambition, your utter want of principle and honour. You shall have a liberal allowance, but from to-day you become my wife only in name. I repudiate and cast you off as unworthy of the love I once lavished upon you."

He turned and went out of the door as he ceased speaking. When Cynthia's maid entered the room later on she found her mistress lying senseless upon the floor. For the first time in her pleasant, luxurious, self-indulgent life Cynthia had fainted.

(Continued on page 88)

MY SWEETHEART.

CHAPTER LII.

WHEN Dudley returned to consciousness he found himself in an ambulance being whirled rapidly over the streets of London. All in an instant the thrilling scene through which he had just passed recurred to him, and at that instant a sharp pain, almost in the region of his heart, made him catch his breath quickly.

"They are taking me to the hospital," he muttered; "and I won't get out for a fortnight at the soonest, and by that time that beautiful little scoundrel will be married and far away."

Dudley made a daring resolve. They should not drag him to the hospital if he could prevent it. He chose a moment when the two men in the ambulance were speaking with each other in the front of the wagon for one brief moment.

Raising himself slowly, and watching carefully, he let himself drop noiselessly out of the back of the wagon.

In that one instant, when the man in the rear of the wagon should have been keeping charge, and who had transgressed the rules by leaving his post, Dudley made good his escape.

Faint and dizzy, he picked himself up and dodged into the nearest doorway. To his great delight, Dudley found he was scarcely a street away from the house.

A smile of exultation lighted up his face.

"Paula will find me game yet!" he muttered.

He found he was in the doorway adjoining a drugstore, and he lost no time in entering the place, and walking as steadily as he could to the counter, demanded a draught of something strong that would brace him up. When he had drunk it, he felt the blood tingling with new life through his veins, and the strength of a Samson in his arms.

He made his way quickly back to the Barton mansion, resolving to enter the house again at any cost. He felt assured that the servants would never admit him, and so he made his way cautiously to the side entrance, stealing up the serpentine gravelled walk, and gaining the porch that opened out upon the library without meeting anyone belonging to the house.

He heard the sound of voices, and pushing aside the dry masses of tangled creepers that clung about the windows, peered breathlessly in, without being seen himself.

The sight that met his gaze made the blood leap like fire to his brain.

He saw Paula standing there in her bridal robes, her hand tightly clasped in that of Gregor Thorpe's, and the minister standing before them with an open book from which he was reading.

He heard the minister say to Thorpe:

"Will you take this woman to be your wedded wife, to love, cherish, and protect till death do you part?"

And he heard Gregor's firm, clear reply. Then the minister turned slowly and put a similar question to Paula.

Another moment and it would be too late. She must never answer that question.

Quick as a flash, Dudley's hand travelled to his breast-pocket, and grasped the cruel messenger of death that he always carried hidden there.

She should never be Gregor Thorpe's wife—she should die first!

Turning the weapon full upon Paula's heart, he fired, but in his intense excitement the ball went wide of its mark.

Dudley turned with the rapidity of lightning, and, despite the pain of the wound above his heart, succeeded in making his way out of the grounds and into the crowded street, mingling unconcernedly with the surging crowd that passed to and fro.

He did not walk far, for the horrible pain grew more intense. He reeled and fell heavily to the pavement, and in that moment the ambulance dashed quickly up to him.

"Ah, here is our man!" they cried, simultaneously. But how he ever got from the road to the pavement, and lay there so long without being picked up, was to them an astonishing mystery.

They made sure of their patient this time, however, landing him safely in the hospital.

All that night the attendant listened to his wild ravings, but no one ever dreamed how much truth they contained.

But to return to Gregor Thorpe. He found little trouble in securing admission for Mildred in the Retreat. He made a clean breast of the whole affair to the matron in charge, and left the girl in her care.

"Poor child!" said the matron, pityingly, as she followed the attendants to the room that had been designated for Mildred's use, and bent over the white couch on which they laid her.

"Poor child!" she repeated, pushing the dark clustering curls back from her white forehead, "who would ever have believed this girl guilty of such an atrocious crime! But, ah, me! jealousy will turn the gentlest woman into a fiend. I wonder why poets speak of love as the 'sweetest boon e'er given to woman' when so many have found it a bitter curse!"

Even while she was pondering over the matter the girl's sad, dark eyes opened, and she looked wonderingly into the face bending over her.

The matron laid her warm hand on the girl's icy brow.

"You are about to ask where you are. Everyone asks the same question when they first come here," she said, gently, "and so I will answer it in advance of the query: You are in a quiet place which has been provided for you by those who, despite all, would save you if they could. You are to remain here and await the issue."

Mildred looked at her with wide-open eyes, quite believing that she had not heard aright.

Had the whole world suddenly gone mad. Gregor Thorpe had spoken to her in just such a manner. What did it mean?

"There must be some mistake," said Mildred. "I am certainly not ill, and I cannot understand the import of your words," she declared, struggling up to a sitting posture.

"She does not wish any reference made to the tragedy," the matron told herself; and she began to think that the girl was quite hardened for one so young.

"Did Mr. Thorpe bring me here?" she faltered.

The matron bowed.

"I shall not trouble you with my presence one unnecessary moment," said Mildred, with dignity. "If you will have one of your servants bring me my bonnet, I will go at once."

"You are to remain here until the issue of that unfortunate affair at the Bartons," repeated the matron, firmly.

Mildred gasped faintly, and a sharp cry broke from her lips.

She quite believed that they meant she was to be called upon to answer before a court of law for the finding of Dudley in Paula's bonnet. Of course it must be that—and, oh! the pity of it—the pity of it that the world looked upon her with such horror, supposing she had sinned, when in truth she was as guiltless as a little babe.

She covered her face with her hands and

sobbed aloud, and the matron gently turned away, leaving her to sob out her grief alone.

Mildred heard the key turn in the lock, and again she felt that she was a prisoner—restrained of her liberty, cut off from the world, and under lock and key.

What would be the end of this most unfortunate affair?

Mildred resolved to send for Mrs. Morris, but, much to her surprise, the attendants refused to deliver her message, and the matron looked at the girl in amazement when she asked piteously if Miss Barton, who was probably by this time Mrs. Gregor Thorpe, had left town.

"I wonder that you ask me that," she returned, giving poor Mildred a most searching look; and again she said to herself that the audacity of this girl, who looked so very innocent, was beyond comprehension.

The only course open to Mildred to escape from her present difficulties was to write to Mrs. Morris, she concluded; and she resolved to make another effort.

From that moment, she regarded very wistfully the young girl who was in the habit of bringing in her meals to her.

"Will you do a favour for me?" asked Mildred, one day, laying her hand lightly on the girl's arm.

"Oh, yes—if I can, m's," returned the little maid.

"Will you bring me a sheet of paper, an envelope, and a lead-pencil? I wish to write a note to a lady, and I wish you to take it to her. You have often admired this turquoise ring on my finger; it is one of the gifts my dear dead mother gave me, and I prize it more than anything else that I have in the world; but dear as it is to me, take this letter to the lady to whom it is addressed, and the ring shall be yours."

The maid gave a little cry of delight, and promised at once to do Mildred's bidding.

The note was written, begging Mrs. Morris, for the love of Heaven to come to her at once, and handed to the maid, together with the much-longed for and highly-prized turquoise ring.

The maid slipped the letter in her pocket and the ring on her finger, and fairly flew down the stairs.

She did not find an opportunity to get out of the institution for even five minutes that afternoon.

Suddenly a bright idea came to the maid.

"Why, how foolish I was to think of taking it there," muttered the maid, "when there is a letter-box on the lamp-post just outside the door! That's where all other people put their letters."

The girl hurriedly ran out to the letter-box with it and dropped it in. But, ah, me! it bore no stamp upon it, and the maid, who could neither read nor write, never dreamed that it required one.

CHAPTER LIII.

GREGOR THORPE was constantly at Paula's bedside during the three weeks that followed. He scarcely took time to eat or sleep, and with each day that passed his thoughts grew more bitter each time he thought of poor, helpless Mildred.

The deed she had committed shut her out from the least sympathy, and he cried out to Heaven that if Paula died Mildred should pay the full penalty of the law for it. And yet the thought brought with it a pang that wrung his very heart. Try as he would, he could not quite hate Mildred.

During that time he received a note from Mrs. Morris, asking him to call at the cottage; and, very reluctantly, Gregor that evening obeyed.

Mrs. Morris met him at the door with a white, anxious face.

"What has become of Mildred?" she asked, in a troubled voice, as soon as he had taken a seat. "From the moment you took her away to nurse Mr. Barton's granddaughter back to life and health I have not heard from her."

Gregor Thorpe's face turned very white, and

this fact did not escape the keen eyes of his old nurse.

"Where is Mildred, and what is the matter?" she repeated.

Then the whole story came out—of Mildred's treachery in trying to part him from his love; how she had failed; and lastly, the story of the terrible tragedy, wherein Mildred had attempted to shoot down Miss Barton at the very altar, and was only spared from becoming a red-handed murderess by the interposition of fate.

Mrs. Morris started to her feet with sudden fury.

"It is false!" she cried; "the whole story is false from beginning to end! If an angel cried out, trumpet-tongued, that Mildred Garstin, who is at heart as sweet, pure, and innocent as a dreaming child, had committed the crime you lay at her door, I would not believe it. It is some vile conspiracy. You were not satisfied with throwing her over and breaking her heart, but now you want to put her out of the way. What your object is only heaven knows. There is something at the bottom of this that I cannot understand. Where is the poor child now?" cried Mrs. Morris, with bitter anger. "Tell me, that I may go to her at once."

Gregor said to himself that it was far better that she did not know.

"She has disappeared," he said, evasively, "and will no doubt remain in hiding until Miss Barton's recovery or her death occurs."

"I shall find her and go to her," declared Mrs. Morris. "You can turn from her in this hour of sad affliction if your conscience will permit you to do so, but I shall not. What if Miss Barton dies!" she cried, shrilly, confronting him. "Could you—would you hunt poor Mildred down and be the one to cast the first stone at her?"

Gregor Thorpe could not stand the fire of her words. They distressed him beyond measure.

"I am waiting for your answer, Gregor Thorpe," she cried. "Would you—could you, go against her?"

"Crimes must meet with their just punishment," he said, slowly.

Mrs. Morris rose slowly to her feet.

"When you were a little child, a babe but a few hours old," she said, "your mother placed you in my arms, and whispered: 'Nurse, I am dying. Oh! nurse, how hard it is to die and leave my little one motherless. Watch over him as long as you live, even though it be from afar off.' I pledged my word I would do so, and I have so far kept my pledge; but from this moment I will never willingly look upon your face again. Go! Leave my humble cottage roof, and never put your foot across this threshold!"

Gregor looked at her sorrowfully, yet he could not help but feel grateful to her for taking Mildred's part so nobly.

True to her word, Mrs. Morris, during the days and weeks that followed, commenced a vigorous search for Mildred. But it was all useless.

Meanwhile, Mildred watched and waited, in an agony of doubt that was pitiful to behold, for the letter from Mrs. Morris which never came.

During that interval Gregor Thorpe called regularly at the Retreat to inquire of the Matron how Mildred was; but he never asked to see the girl herself.

"Is she repentant?" he asked once; and the good woman shook her head.

"Her sole thought is to get away from here," she answered.

Gregor Thorpe walked away from the Retreat with a heavy heart.

Paula continued to grow steadily worse, and at length Miss Dawes met him at the door one morning with tear-swollen eyes and a sad, white face.

"It is all over," she said, commencing to sob as though her heart would break.

"Paula is—"

He could not finish his sentence; the words seemed to stick in his throat.

"She is dead," said Miss Dawes, sadly; "the murderous bullet has effected its fatal work at last."

Gregor staggered back against the wall. It almost seemed to Miss Dawes that the words had killed him.

"Dead!" he repeated, hoarsely. "Oh, great Heaven, great Heaven! It cannot be. I cannot believe it. Heaven would not be so cruel to me!"

No words which Miss Dawes could utter comforted him. His grief was awful to behold.

She had never witnessed such an awful storm of anguish.

He was like a great strong oak bowed to the ground by the whirlwind of woe that encompassed him.

He begged to see Paula, and gently she led him to the boudoir where the girl lay—cold, still, white—like a beautiful image carved in spotless marble.

Gregor Thorpe threw himself down on his knees beside the couch, and his heart-rending cries brought tears to the eyes of those who heard them. They felt quite sure that his heart would break, and that the lovers would be buried in one grave.

Ah! how fair she looked, lying there in the cold clasp of the bridegroom—Death!

Beautiful words he had read somewhere occurred to him in that awful moment: "She looked like a being fresh from the hand of Heaven, not one who had lived and suffered death."

Her little hands were clasped over her bosom, and her pretty lips were half-parted, and the soft, babyish rings were lying so carelessly over the white brow.

"Oh, God! can this be death!" he cried out, hoarsely.

They could not force him away from the couch for long hours, neither could they plead with him nor urge him. They feared he would go mad then and there.

But the fiercest storm must wear itself away in time; and at length, when exhaustion set in, he was obliged to allow them to lead him gently away, because he had not the strength left to resist them.

During the three days that followed, Gregor Thorpe was in a delicious condition. Miss Dawes was thankful.

He did not know when the final preparations for poor Paula were being made, nor when they laid her away in the vault that had for scores of years held all that was mortal of the Bartons, and more than one eye was wet with tears as the solemn cortege turned away and left poor Paula there, with the faint rays of the setting sun shining on the marble mausoleum that shut her in from the busy world.

When the stars came out that night, Miss Dawes watched them with weeping eyes, knowing just how brightly they were shining on the flower-bordered path that led to poor, sweet Paula's last home.

Her heart would have throbbed with terror if she could have but known what was taking place in that lonely path at that identical moment.

Standing close beside the iron door was the tall figure of a man sorting over a bunch of keys with his slim, white hands.

The moon came out from behind a cloud and shone full upon his face for an instant, and in that instant the dark, diabolical face of Pierce Dudley was clearly discernible.

He fitted a bright new key to the lock. There was a dull, grating sound, and the iron door swung heavily back upon its hinges.

Dudley stepped quickly across the damp, mouldy stone floor, drawing a dark lantern from beneath his coat as he did so.

By its clear, bright flash he discovered at once the new coffin with its fair young burden, which had been placed there but a few hours before.

"Heavens! what if she should be dead!" he muttered to himself, great beads of perspiration standing out upon his forehead.

In a trice he had torn off the lid and laid his hand on the cold, white brow.

Taking a vial from his breast pocket, he emptied half of its contents between the cold, white lips, bending his ear close to her heart the while.

"She is really dead!" he cried, with a terrible imprecation. But at that instant he felt a slight

quiver of the eyelids beneath his hand. "Ah! she still lives!" he cried, excitedly.

In less time than it takes to tell it, he raised the slight form from the all too narrow bed, wrapped a dark cloak about it, and quickly bore it out of the damp vault and down the serpentine path to a carriage which stood in waiting.

Lifting her into the vehicle, he drove away like one mad from the uncanny spot. He had not driven far when a low sigh from the helpless figure beside him caused him to start, and he realised that Paula was fast gaining consciousness.

He set his teeth hard together and drove faster.

Suddenly the blue eyes opened and a faint gasp came from the white lips.

"Where am I?" whispered Paula, looking around her in a dazed, bewildered manner.

"You are in the power, at last, of the man whom you have so long defied!" cried Dudley, triumphantly.

CHAPTER LIV.

"PIERCE DUDLEY!" cried Paula, coming to her full senses with an awful shock.

"At your service," he answered, coldly, insolently.

Then it occurred to Paula that she was being driven somewhere over a rocky road.

"Where am I, and how came I here?" she demanded, attempting to free herself from his detaining hand and to spring from the vehicle.

"Do not attempt that," he said, "for I warn you you could not accomplish it. You can never escape me again."

A terrified scream, shrill and piercing, broke from Paula's lips.

"I do not mind that in the least," he said; "there is no one along this lonely road to hear you."

"How dared you abduct me!" screamed Paula.

"It hardly comes under the head of abduction," he responded.

"By to-morrow my friends will miss me and make a search for me!" she cried. "No one can accomplish such a dastardly scheme in an enlightened country like this. By to-morrow's light they will find me, never fear."

"You will not be missed," he said, confidently, "for your friends have, as they supposed, left you sleeping quietly enough in your coffin."

"It is false!" cried Paula; "false as everything else you say."

"That subject scarcely needs discussion," said he, quietly; "your garments will satisfy you as to that."

He tossed back the long, thick, dark cloak, and, with horror too great for words, Paula saw that she was indeed robed for the grave.

Horror held her speechless for a moment, and in that moment he went on venomously:

"You thought to outwit me and escape me most cleverly, but that woman does not live who can balk a man when he really makes up his mind. You thought you had finished me that afternoon in your boudoir; but you see I am still yours to command as yet. Maddened with rage, I attempted to put a stop to the whole matter when I saw you standing at the altar with my hated rival. I missed the mark, and I am glad now that I did, for life would be nothing to me, my sweetheart Paula, without you."

"You were ill from the effects of it for a fortnight or more, and that length of time I also lay at death's door from the wound you gave me, and while lying sick I thought out a desperate plot one day. And how perfectly I have carried it out is evidenced by your presence here. It was the most ingenious idea that any human being ever thought of!" he cried, with a diabolical laugh.

"I made friends with the druggist's assistant, where your prescriptions were put up, as soon as I got out of the hospital, and I succeeded in slipping into the medicine each time, unnoticed, a few drops of a deadly drug which produces in the patient the semblance of death itself. It has baffled the best doctors and men of science."

"I intended that they should bury you, and

that it should be my pleasure to liberate you from the tomb to which they had consigned you. The whole plan has worked like a charm. Now you know why they will not miss you, and, later on, when they discover your absence they can simply think the ghouls have been at work, and they will never be able to trace you.

"I have made arrangements to take you away on a yacht that lies anchored in the bay awaiting us. There is little use in wasting my breath in pleading with you to marry me; you will be willing enough to be my wife all in good time, I foresee."

"Never!" cried Paula. "I would kill myself first."

"Time works wonders in women's fancies," he declared, with a low laugh. "No doubt you are very faint," he said; "for, to my knowledge, you cannot have tasted food for the last two or three days, so you must drink this;" and with that he produced a flask from his pocket, and fairly forced some of its contents down her throat.

Paula felt a glowing sensation from brow to feet, then a terrible dizziness. She could hear Dudley's voice still discussing his plans, but it seemed to come from afar off, growing fainter and fainter with each moment of time.

At last, wholly unconscious, she sank back in Dudley's arms.

"She will be less troublesome this way than in any other," he muttered, grimly.

An hour's hard driving brought him to the dock.

A man who was there in a small boat, apparently on the watch for him, signalled him cautiously.

Dudley signalled him, and handed his insensible burden into the man's arms as he pulled up alongside the dock, then sprang in by the man's side.

"You may take the oars again," he said, sharply; "and see to it that you pull with a will."

The man nodded.

With a few strokes of his oars he sent the little boat flying over the mad waste of waters.

After half an hour's hard pulling against wind and tide, the skiff drew up to a large yacht anchored to the windward of the dock.

The man who was walking the deck stopped short as the skiff drew up.

"Ah, captain! you are punctual," he said.

"Yes," said Dudley, sharply, handing up his burden. "Have you everything warm and comfortable in the cabin—and is Chloe there?"

"Yes," returned the man.

When Dudley had climbed on deck, he again took the inanimate form of Paula in his arms, and strode towards the cabin with her.

A young negress was standing by the window, looking out over the wild waste of waters when he entered and laid Paula carefully down on the black leather lounge.

"Chloe," he said, sharply.

"Yes, sir," said the girl, coming forward with alacrity.

"Here is your charge," said Dudley. "See that you take the best care of her. Let her want for nothing that you can get her; but, mind, you are never to leave her alone for a moment. If she makes her escape you will have to answer for it."

The girl showed her ivory teeth in a broad smile.

"The young lady could not go very far, Massa Dudley," she replied, with a laugh. "The yacht isn't so very big."

"She might jump into the water," returned Dudley, sharply.

The girl looked frightened.

By this time she had succeeded in unloosening the great, heavy cloak which enveloped Paula, then she started back with a low cry of horror.

"Oh, good Lord! De Lord hab mercy, Massa Dudley, she's got on—a shroud!"

"You're a fool!" cried Dudley, sharply. "It's a white lace ball-dress!"

"This is no ball-dress, Massa Dudley," declared the girl, solemnly. "I used to be in a family where there were young ladies, and many a time I've seen 'em dressed for a ball; but they never

wore dresses like this! Bat one of 'em died, and they dressed her the same as this. I know a shroud from a ball-dress, Massa Dudley."

A muttered imprecation broke from Dudley's lips.

"Don't stand there talking nonsense!" he cried, as he turned on his heel and walked out of the cabin.

The yacht lifted anchor and flew like a swift-winged bird over the seething waters, until at length the lights from the great city faded like specks from her view.

With folded arms and a sardonic smile on his face, Dudley paced the deck alone.

"They laugh best who laugh last," he quoted.

"We shall soon see the finale of this little game of hearts which we have been playing. As for Paula herself, all love for her died in the hour in which she raised that little toy dagger against me, and plunged it, as she supposed, to the very hilt in my heart. Now I will show her how sweet is revenge! I shall show her, and to her cost, that there is

"No foe like the foe that was once a friend.

No hate like what once was love;

Fearfully through the gloom I wend—

Where shall I hide me or how defend

From the poisoned shafts thereof?"

Yes, Paula will find out to her cost now what it means to make an enemy of a man whose love she has trampled beneath her feet!

Suddenly he heard a commotion in the cabin, followed a moment later by a heavy splash in the water.

"Heavens!" cried Dudley, springing to the doorway of the cabin; and in the little passage that led to it he met Chloe coming in search of him and trembling like an aspen leaf.

CHAPTER LV.

"Oh, sir!" cried Chloe, "don't blame me when I tell you what has happened, for 'deed I didn't know, sir, that she would do such a thing as that!"

"What is it, girl?" yelled Dudley, seizing her arm and holding it in a terrible grip. "Speak! What has happened?"

"The lady, sir," gasped Chloe, struggling to free herself from his angry clutch—"the young lady has jumped overboard. I could not reach her in time."

With a terrible imprecation, Dudley dashed aft, and was just in time to see a dark object disappear suddenly from view beneath the mad, surging waves some little distance from the yacht.

Quick as thought, he tore off his coat and sprang into the seething water, was dashing the yacht about on its bosom like a veritable egg-shell.

Dudley was an expert swimmer, and although wind and tide were against him, he soon reached the spot where the dark object had disappeared, and, as he did so, a human form came to the surface within a few feet of him. He knew it was Paula.

A few strokes brought him to the spot, and he clutched at the figure which was sinking again from sight, catching it in a firm grasp.

In less time than it takes to relate it, Dudley had reached the deck with his burden. Eager hands quickly took it from him, and assisted him on board again.

Once more Paula was taken into the cabin and placed in charge of Chloe, Dudley following, gasping with exhaustion.

"Now look to it that your charge does not escape you a second time," he cried, sharply; "for if she does, I'll throw you in after her!"

The girl shrank away from him, muttering some incoherent reply.

"Do you understand me?" cried Dudley, threateningly.

"Deed I does, Massa Dudley," she answered, quickly.

When he had quitted the cabin, the girl looked after him with glowering eyes.

"If ever there was a fiend incarnate, that man

am one!" she muttered, clenching her dark little hands viciously together. "I shall never forget the day he struck me—never! And if I live a lifetime to do it, I'll pay him back for it, never fear!"

At this juncture a deep sigh broke from Paula's lips.

The girl bent over her, and hastily commenced her task of divesting the slight form of its wet garments.

"I wonder who she is!" she thought, gazing curiously down on the white, marvellously beautiful face; "but, strangest of all, why is she robed like this?"

"Water—water!" gasped the white lips.

"Bless us, missus! as if you hadn't had enough of it in the last five minutes! If you hadn't been almost a fish you'd a-drowned in it."

"Water—water!" moaned the faint voice again. Chloe held a cup to her lips, and, to her surprise, she drained it.

"Laws, miss, how feverish you am!" cried Chloe.

Paula struggled up to her elbow, and looked first at the dark face of the girl bending over her, then fearfully at her surroundings.

"Why am I here?" she demanded, piteously.

"When I woke to consciousness and found myself in this place a little while since, my brain seemed to turn to fire. I sprang out on to the deck and down into the waves. Who was so cruel as to snatch me back to life again?"

"I reckon it's Massa Dudley you'll have to thank for it, honey," she replied, serenely.

A bitter cry broke from Paula's lips.

"Why did not God let me perish in the waves rather than be saved by him," she cried, frantically—"my mortal foe?"

"You are rather ungrateful for the service that has been rendered you," said a sneering voice from the doorway; and, looking up, Paula saw the dark face of Pierce Dudley, smiling at her mockingly. "I must add," he remarked, gallantly, "that the dark, coarse suit in which Chloe has clothed you does not detract one iota from your beauty, as I had rather imagined it would."

"I seem to be in your power, therefore I cannot but submit to your inflicting your presence in this manner upon me," sobbed Paula bitterly.

"I am glad you look at it philosophically, my dear," he responded, gallantly. "Take my word for it, that is always the best plan of procedure."

If eyes could have struck him dead, the glance from Paula's blue ones would have annihilated him on the spot.

"If you care to listen to my plans," he continued, "I shall be very much pleased to discuss them with you."

Paula did not answer him.

"Silence gives consent," he said gracefully, "and I will proceed to explain to you that we intend making the trip clear across to the other side in this yacht. The reason must be obvious to you: I am owner of the affair, and all on board are therefore obedient to my commands."

If you should take it in your pretty little head to cry out or prove obstinate, there about you will pay very little attention to you, so I would advise you, candidly, my dear, to save your breath. Your fate is fixed, you will perceive, and if you are wise you will accept it calmly and make the best of it. You can make an angel or a demon of me, Paula. How much better it would be to make friends with me than to keep up a continual warfare! In time such a course might lead me to hate you quite as much as I love you now. Constant wrangling, like constant dripping of water on a stone, wears it away—all good feeling, I mean."

Paula turned her face to the wall and sobbed anew as if her heart would break. Like most men, Dudley detested tears, and turned away abruptly on his heel.

"Rest to-night; we will talk the matter over in the morning," he said, and abruptly quitted the room.

On the deck he met one of the yacht's crew.

"It looks very much like a storm, sir," the man remarked.

Dudley looked uneasily about him.

"Within the last three hours the wind has



PIERCE DUDLEY RAISED THE SLIGHT FORM, AND QUICKLY BORE IT FROM THE DAMP VAULT.

veered to the north; we shall have a tempest of it before daylight. If you take my advice, sir, you will put back to shore and hug the coast until the storm is over."

"Nonsense!" cried Dudley, harshly. "We will do nothing of the kind. Pretty sort of sailor you are, to fear a storm!"

"It's the young lady, sir," replied the man. "I have said from the first, you will remember, sir, that it was hazardous making this trip in so light a yacht at this season of the year. I predicted that we should encounter this storm, and I do not think it a wise plan to be rash in the face of danger."

"I shall not turn back!" retorted Dudley, determinedly.

But even while he spoke he felt the force of the man's remarks in the swift warning of the elements about him, and soon the storm, which had been predicted, broke upon them in all its fury. The wind, ere long, howled like a demon, and soon the waves dashed mountain-high against the yacht, tossing it about like an egg-shell.

It was destined to be the worst storm that had been known for many a year. At length Dudley saw the crew advancing toward him in a body.

"It is of no use, sir," said one of the men, stepping forward and acting as spokesman for the rest. "It's foolhardy madness for us to think of making this trip, even though you paid us twice the sum you offered. The wind drives us back to the coast; it's of no use battling against it any longer, sir."

Dudley greeted this remark with a fierce imprecation, but despite his anger and stubborn command that they must push onward, the gale drove them steadily shoreward. It was such a storm as even the oldest seaman had never encountered before.

And when the morning broke cold and grey over the waste of waters, it found the yacht tossed helplessly on the mad waves, like a bird with a broken wing, and Dudley was glad to

give the order to get to shore. If it lay within their power.

But the order was given too late—the mischief was already done.

A terrible cry broke from each of the seamen's lips.

"We are foundering—we shall sink before any one discovers our flag of distress!" and cries both loud and deep against Dudley rent the air; and one of the men, more daring than the rest, cried out:

"It is his fault if we must die! Let him answer for it!"

Simultaneously three of their number sprang forward, and although Dudley fought like a demon, strong hands picked him up and hurled him bodily down into the seething waves.

"He will not die," remarked one of the men, "even though the mad waves cover him! He is a human cork."

Suddenly one of the men cried out:

"Look—look! we are saved! Here is a tug coming to our rescue!"

In the excitement that followed the thrilling rescue, Dudley was entirely forgotten.

When the tug reached the shore, the crew made all haste to land and betake themselves off, declaring they knew nothing of the young lady who had been found on board, or from whence she came; that was the captain's affair, and he had been lost, they averred, during the early part of the storm.

As for the young lady, she could give no account of herself whatever, for she lay tossing in a delirious fever.

Even the maid had deserted her most heartlessly.

What they should do with her was a question which troubled them greatly.

Despite the coarse clothing which she wore, even these rough men could see that she was a lady.

"I know of one place," remarked one of them, "in which my sister is employed as a nurse. I

think we could get her in there, and she would be well taken care of, poor girl!"

This suggestion was met with decided approval by the captain.

And thus it was that the strange hand of Fate placed Paula in the same institution whose roof covered the head of poor, hapless Mildred, though in another part of the building. The same nurse attended both.

When Paula was brought in and laid on the snow-white bed, the woman bent over her with a kindly, sympathetic face.

"I cannot tell why," she remarked, "but this young girl reminds me strangely of that sweet, dark-eyed, sad-faced one in the other ward. They each have the same way of clasping their little hands and looking up at you."

The remark was overheard by the little maid who attended Mildred, and who had taken her ring as a bribe to post the letter to Mrs. Morris.

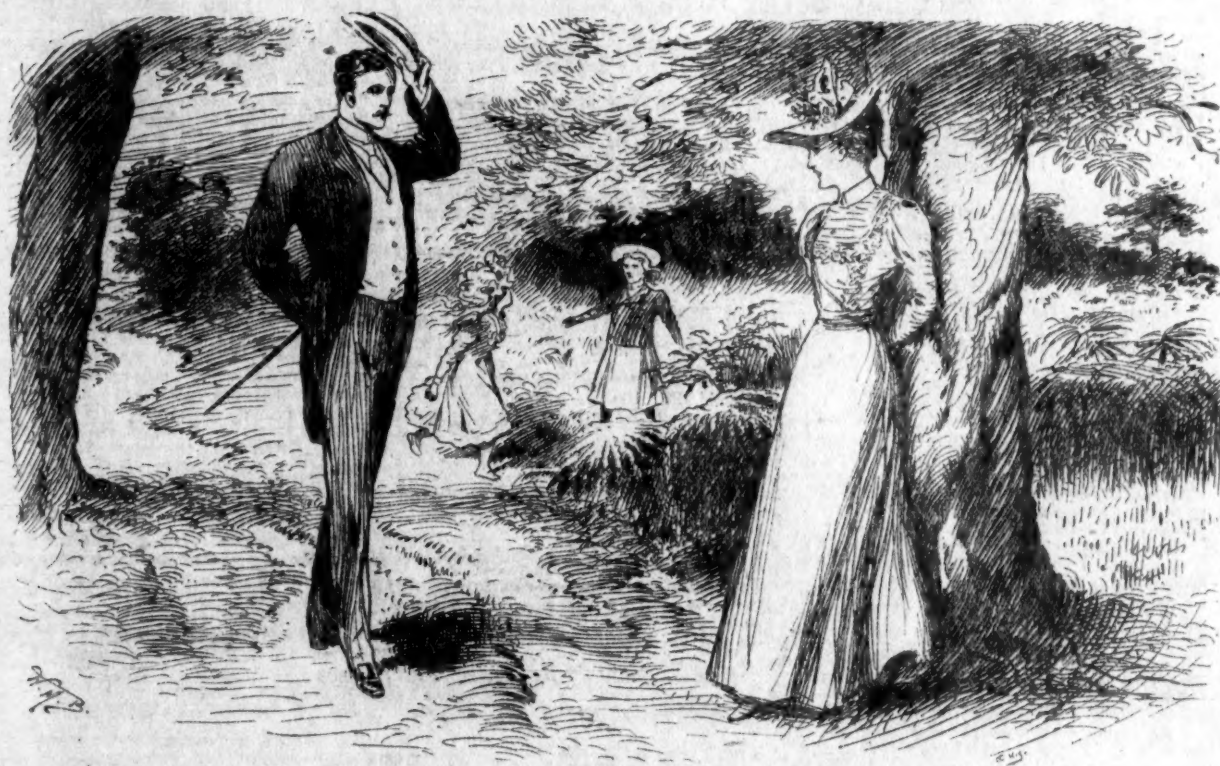
"She does look like her," thought the girl; and straightway she went to Mildred's room to tell her of the beautiful young stranger in the other part of the building who so strangely resembled herself, even though she were dark.

The lovely stranger, too, had muttered some strange words in her delirium which had caught the girl's ears and had puzzled her.

(To be continued.)

SIAMSESE women entrust their children to the care of elephants, who are careful never to hurt the little creatures; and if danger threatens, the sagacious animal will curl the child gently up in his trunk, and swing it up out of harm's way upon its own broad back.

SOME of the inhabitants of New Guinea have an odd way of disposing of their dead. They place the bodies on raised platforms at some distance from their dwellings, and when the flesh has disappeared, the skulls are removed to and stored in a cabin erected for that purpose.



LOOKING UP LILIAN SAW THE MAN WHO WAS HER LOVE—HER HERO.

NAMELESS.

—101—

CHAPTER XII.

A MOMENT'S silence, as the solemn midnight hour struck out its chimes; then she, who had been Lord Earl's darling, who was so fitted to be the joy and crown of a good man's life, raised her beautiful eyes to Sir Ronald's face.

"Let me go!"

"Not until you have answered me," he repeated, fiercely. "I tell you, you must take your choice; there is no middle course. To you I must be dearest of all, or most cruel foe. I ask you, Lilian, which is it to be—war or peace?"

The girl never hesitated. Full well she knew the danger she was risking, but her answer came clear and distinct in one word,—

"War!"

"So be it!" He moved aside to let her pass. "A time will come, young lady, when you will regret your choice. I have loved you too well to yield you cheerfully to another. I will make your life so desolate that if tears of blood could wash out that fatal word of defiance you would gladly shed them."

She answered him nothing, this little foundling, who was a beggar and an outcast, who had no true name even of her own. She never trembled beneath his threats; she passed from his sight with head erect and flashing eyes; only when she had reached the shelter of her own room she broke into a passion of bitter sobs. It seemed to her that no creature on God's beautiful earth had ever been more desolate than she; that there was no rest, no repose, no security for her in all the wide, wide world.

She sobbed herself to sleep, and when she woke from her disturbed, fitful slumber, the bright summer sunshine was pouring into the room, and the little maid who usually waited upon the schoolroom party stood at her bedside with a letter.

Lilian was conscious of some terrible recollection; then the scene of last night came back to her in all its horror. She looked so white and ill that the servant expressed surprise.

"It is nothing," said Lilian, putting one hand to her burning brow; "only my head aches, and I am tired. I shall be downstairs in a very few moments."

Left alone, she opened the letter; its contents gave her a little relief. She had fancied it came from her cruel persecutor; in reality it was from Mr. Darby. The rector told her, in a few manly lines, that he by no means gave up his cherished hopes; he still trusted in time to overcome her reluctance to make him happy; serious illness in his own family called him unexpectedly from home. He could not leave the neighbourhood without assuring her he was still her devoted and attached friend. He begged her in any trouble, any difficulty, to write to him; he could have no greater pleasure than to think and act for her.

"He is a good man," thought Lilian, as she folded away the letter with a tear; "why couldn't I love him! Oh! love, how strange it is! I gave my heart away to a man who has no grain of affection for me, who simply helped me from mere compassion, and yet for all time I love him. I could not marry Mr. Darby while my heart is his friend's."

It never struck her during her hasty toilet that Mr. Darby's absence almost played into Sir Ronald's hands; she never realized that she was more helpless, more thoroughly in his power, now the brave gentleman who loved her so fondly and would have protected her from sorrow at the risk of his own life was away.

Things went on much as usual that day. Lilian might almost have believed last night's alarm an idle dream, but for a certain look of triumph upon the face of Sir Ronald Trevlyn, and a terrified recollection of those cruel caresses which no dream could have left.

Almost a week passed on, and Lilian began to feel almost safe. Surely her persecutor must

have relented, since he delayed so long he could not mean to fulfil his threats!

It was a lovely summer's afternoon; the sun was warm, but a cool refreshing breeze prevented its rays from being too oppressive. Lilian and the children had been for a long walk, and were returning through the park. Daisy and Pansy, in wild spirits, were careering about like butterflies; their governess stood leaning against a tree, thinking how happy she might have been in this lovely home but for the threats of Sir Ronald Trevlyn; but for a certain aching pain at her heart—a pain all women must learn to know, if they are unfortunate enough to give their love without hope of return.

She made a pretty picture as she stood there leaning against a tree. The extreme heat had driven her to cast aside her cloak, and she wore a simple white dress; her broad-brimmed hat suited the oval shape of her face, and her glorious golden hair glittered in the summer sunshine; her dark blue eyes were full of intense feeling. Taken all in all, it was a lovely face, one that, once seen, must imprint itself upon the memory for ever.

"Have you forgotten me?"

She looked up and saw the man who had rescued her in her sorest need, who, though he might never know it, was her love—her hero. Guy Ainslie stood before her, a strange smile upon his thoughtful face.

"I believe you were lost in a day-dream," he said pleasantly. "Miss Green, will you not welcome me to the Castle?"

She put her little snowflake of a hand into his outstretched one. He thought how she was changed from the thin, dispirited-looking creature he had first noticed at the City restaurant; and then he remembered the story which had reached him of the Rector's wooing. Was it his friend's love which had brought the colour to those fair cheeks—the brightness to the dark eyes?

"Are you happy here?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes," answered Lillian, very frankly; "so happy I often ask myself if it will last!"

Guy decided the engagement must be an established fact, and felt a kind of distaste for his old friend, which he could not understand.

"Archibald Darby is an old comrade of mine!" he said, gravely. "I have known him, man and boy, for over twenty years, Miss Green, and I think you need have no fears of your happiness not lasting. He is a very knight of olden days, strong and resolute, tender and true."

"Please don't!"

"I forgot I had only spoken to you twice before," he said, stiffly; "somehow I had thought of you almost as an old friend. I ought, perhaps, not to have offered my congratulations so unceremoniously!"

"It is not that!" and the girl blushed furiously; "you are the kindest friend I ever had, only—you are mistaken."

"Am I?" asked Guy, kindly. "Why, Lady Dacres came to my sister with the news in great distress at the thought of losing you."

"She will never love me like that!" returned Lillian. "Mr. Alnais, how is your sister?"

"Very well indeed!"

"And she is still at Leckenham?"

"Yes; we are not fond of moving. You must go and stay with her in your holidays. I suppose you do have holidays sometimes!"

"I don't know. I never thought of asking!"

"Are they good to you?" looking searchingly into her face. "You know we sent you here, and we have a sort of claim to know if you are satisfied."

"I am quite satisfied!"

"And those are the children?" looking at the white-frocked damsels in front. "To think of those being Vivian's daughters!"

"Step-daughters," corrected Lillian.

"Ah, it means the same! I am only just realising it. I have known Lady Dacres ever since she was a little toddling child. It is difficult to think of her as a married lady."

Knowing what she did, Lillian could not raise her eyes to his face, lest he should see the sorrow stamped on it.

At that moment the children ran up, and Guy made friends with them on the spot. In five minutes the two little girls were his devoted slaves.

In the dark, after-time which followed in the sad days, when he knew his own secret, the picture often came back to him. Lillian in her white dress; her beautiful face full of purity and innocence, the children clinging fondly to her hand; when cruel voices were busy with her name; when they tried to cast a shadow on her memory, he thought of this picture, and he knew that every word they said was false. That the girl he had rescued from misery and want might have been unfortunate and poor, but never weak and erring.

They reached the house, my Lady and Sir John meeting them on the threshold.

Vivian's dark eyes gleamed ominously when she saw who had been Guy's companion.

"Miss Green," she said, abruptly, "I cannot have the children tire some to my guests. You should have brought them home another way when you saw they would disturb Mr. Alnais."

Guy's face looked stern. He was a generous man, and he hated oppression. He knew his Cousin Vivian pretty thoroughly. He knew she could be very cruel to anything completely at her mercy, and his heart ached for the slight, delicate girl who never resented the reproach. He was glad when Sir John took up the cudgels.

"Hush, Vivian, men like children! If my little maids bored Guy he could have got rid of them. You think, dear, because children try your nerves everyone is as sensitive as yourself."

Guy laughed.

"We had a charming walk," he said, quietly; "in fact, Vivian, I am under a debt of gratitude to your little daughters for escorting me. Without their guidance I might never have found the way."

"Go to the schoolroom, children," said my Lady. "Miss Green, what are you waiting for?"

Guy was pleased to see the Baronet open the door for his children's governess as respectfully as though she had been a duchess. Then the conversation passed to indifferent topics, and presently Sir John went out and left the cousins alone.

He knew perfectly that they had once been plighted lovers, but he knew also that Guy Alnais was too true and noble to have become his guest unless the old wild passion had died out.

"Well, Vivian," said Guy, trying hard to forget he had ever thought of her as his future wife, "I congratulate you. It would be hard to find a more lovely home than Castle Dacres."

"It's well enough."

"What, tired of your splendour, already? That's not like you!"

"I am tired of everything, Guy! I am the most miserable woman in the whole world!"

She wore rich robes; costly gems glittered on her fingers; everything about her told of wealth and luxury. Her husband idolised her. Guy contrasted her position with that of the lonely little governess, and yet Lillian had told him only half-an-hour before she was "quite happy."

"Nonsense," he said, almost roughly. "You are very happy, Vivian; and, indeed, you have everything to make you so."

"A husband years and years older than myself, and a couple of unruly step-children!"

"You knew Sir John's age before you married him, and the children seem nice little things, my dear girl," falling into the old familiar address, "your troubles are of your own making."

"Yes," she said wistfully, "I suppose they are. I ought never to have married Sir John; but I was ambitious, and to ambition I sacrificed my love."

"Hush," said her cousin, "remember, you are Sir John's wife, and I am his guest. I would never have consented to come here had I thought you could forget this."

"You have forgotten all that went before," she cried, hoarsely, "or is it that you can't forgive me! You treat me as a stranger, a mere acquaintance!"

"I treat you as a good man's honoured wife," he repeated, gravely.

"And you have forgotten—"

No! he could not say that quite yet; she had been gloriously beautiful, and for a brief time he had believed her his own. The hopes and dreams which he had centred on this woman, the love and honour he had poured out upon her, only he and Heaven knew.

"I have forgotten nothing," he said, "for a while you were the sunshine of our home, a little much-loved sister to Kate and myself. You are now Sir John's wife, and our paths in life run differently. The interlude between it behoves us both to forget."

She raised her dark eyes and looked straight into his eyes.

"You have put another in my place!"

"I do not understand you."

"Oh! it is easy for you to tell me to forget. You can forgive Sir John heartily for depriving you of me, since already you are consoled. You have found another love!"

"Really, Vivian, you are too romantic."

"You cannot deny it."

"Deny what?"

"That you are engaged to be married."

Guy laughed grimly.

"Vivian, I have had enough of that. You taught me the lesson of woman's faithlessness pretty effectually. I don't suppose I speak to a young lady once a month."

Vivian's cheek flushed.

"Do you know I always fancied you cared for Miss Green?"

"In that case you hardly showed generosity in introducing her to Darby."

"Guy, do you care?"

"Yes!" he said coolly. "I think she is a delicate, timid girl, and I would never have let Kate send her to you had I guessed how you would treat her. I care for any defenceless girl

too much to like to see her treated as an upper servant."

Lady Dacres's face had brightened.

"When I saw you together just now I fancied—"

"All kinds of stupid things, I dare say."

"That you were going to marry her."

"Darby's means are more than quadruple mine, so I should not be doing her a particular service. Besides, Vivian, as a fact, I have only seen her twice before in my whole life; so if the idea of aspiring to be your cousin has troubled you, put it out of your head, and treat poor Miss Green more like flesh and blood."

Vivian looked at him with a strangely, tender smile.

"Shall you ever marry, Guy?"

"Not for a dozen years, I dare say."

He meant he was quite free at present from any thought of matrimony; but Vivian translated the phrase to imply that while Sir John Dacres lived he would keep single, since the only woman he would ever wish to wed could only be his wife at the baronet's demise.

My Lady went off to dress for dinner in the very best of temper and spirits, and Guy walked slowly to his room, pondering a little sadly upon the change wealth and rank had wrought in her character.

"Of all women in the world Vivian should be gentle with a creature so fair and delicate as Miss Green! But for our giving her a home she might have to fill just such a position as Miss Green's; and she treats her rather worse than her own maid, and not half so well as the grand person in black silk whom she calls her house-keeper!"

CHAPTER XIII.

GUY ALNAIS had been more than a week at the Castle. Less than half of his visit remained.

He stood alone one afternoon in his own room, thinking rather gravely of all that his stay in Monmouthshire had brought about.

He had come there to prove to himself that he was cured of his wounds, fancying that, if he once stayed in Vivian's house as her husband's guest, the old, mad infatuation must die out.

Well, even on first meeting her he had known his cure was complete. He could never be quite indifferent to Vivian Ormond. He could never forget that she had been his first love; but for all else he was cured.

The old love was dead in his heart, and another had risen up.

The lonely girl he had first met fighting her battle with the world, and almost crushed by it—the forlorn waif-and-stray who owned her present home, her very life almost to himself—was his second love.

He had struggled manfully against the infatuation, but it was too much for him. He who had been deceived by a woman once, and resolved never more to believe in one, had staked his only chance of happiness upon a pair of blue eyes.

He loved her. He hardly knew when the feeling sprang up. He could not have told when its germ first took root. He only knew that one morning at breakfast, when Lady Dacres looked up from a letter, and said, sweetly: "Mr. Darby will not be home for another month," he woke up to his own secret. He and Archibald had been like brothers, and now the only feeling he experienced at not seeing Mr. Darby was one of glad relief. In spite of Lillian's words, he believed the Rector would never rest until he won her hand; and the news of his prolonged absence taught Guy it was just that little hand which alone in all the world could make him happy.

He said nothing. He was too full of his own discovery for words. But Sir Ronald Trevlyn, who sat next him, interposed, quickly,—

"What kind of a man is Mr. Darby?"

Many voices were raised in answer. They told how the Rector was brave and just, generous and true; but they also said he was proud and

stern; that he would suffer any pain, bear any sacrifice, rather than the shadow of disgrace.

"Ah!" said Sir Ronald, quietly, "I thought as much. And he is to marry Miss Green!"

"He makes no secret of his wishes," said Lady Dacres, smiling. "It will be a great thing for her."

Guy could not have explained the feeling, but he suddenly conceived an intense desire to knock Sir Ronald down. Of course he could not indulge this desire, but he was conscious of it all the same. He even felt a great relief when Sir John proposed a long ride to some distant object of interest that Sir Ronald excused himself at once.

"I am very sorry, really, but I must stay at home to-day—important letters to write."

His bride-elect seemed annoyed, but the party was soon made up. To Guy's surprise the children were included in it—they were to drive with Miss Cash in the waggone.

"You will go too, Vivian!" asked her husband!

"No; my head is too bad, so you must excuse me; and Miss Cash will, I am sure, take my place as mistress of the occasion. I will order luncheon to be packed up, and I dare say you will have a delightful afternoon."

Guy met the children an hour later in all the flush of anticipation. He noticed that Lillian was not with them.

"She is not coming," said Pansy, simply; "I asked her if she would not be dull, but she says she has a bad headache, and mamma had said she could stay at home."

Guy felt pleased at this mark of woman's consideration; but as he passed the school-room door he was tempted to open it. He knew his secret now—this fair-haired girl was all the world to him, and he longed to see the face which had grown so sweet to him.

Great Heaven! was that Lillian! She sat perfectly erect upon a high-backed chair, her feet planted on the rungs of another, one hand supported her aching head, the other fell listlessly upon her lap. There were purple rings round her dark eyes, and her cheeks were pale as marble. Guy forgot all prudence—all forethought, then he went up to her, and took her hand.

"What is the matter!"

She made no answer—one would really have said she did not hear him. She never raised her head. He could see that her eyes were dry and tearless. Guy Ainslie stood aghast; he had seen something of sorrow in his life, but never a despair like unto this.

"What is it!" he asked again. "Won't you tell me what is troubling you?"

No answer; but the violet eyes were turned towards him, and there flashed on him one look of undying gratitude!

"Trust me," he said, persuasively.

"I do," whispered the girl, "more than anyone in the world."

"Then let me help you."

"No one can do that."

Guy looked at her tenderly, the love at his heart making it ache for the change sorrow and distress had wrought in hers; and then again there came to him the remembrance of his friend. Could it be possible that this sad, lonely creature was sorrowing over Darby's absence!

"If you trusted me you would confide in me," he said, gently.

"I cannot. Oh, Mr. Ainslie! why will you press me to tell you my miserable secret! Can't you see that the very thought of speaking of it crushes me to the earth!"

A fearful suspicion crossed Guy's mind—he knew nothing, absolutely nothing of her past. Could it be that those silent years hid the secret of a sin that, young and beautiful as she was, there lurked a dark stain upon her young life!

She put one hand in his; to his surprise she turned to him with a piteous, beseeching voice.

"Mr. Ainslie, is it very wrong to hide what would set the whole world against me! Is it wicked not to tell Lady Dacres what would make her turn me instantly from her house?"

Guy's heart stood still. Was it as he had feared?

"You are so young," he said gently. "You may have been deceived; you may have been sinned against, not sinning."

"Oh, no!" she answered simply. "I was not deceived, I knew the truth. I knew that it would shut me out from all friendship, all happiness, and so I kept it secret, and I let your sister send me here. I thought I could undertake to teach Daisy and Pansy. I fancied the secret of my life could have no power to hurt them."

Guy Ainslie shook off the little hand as though it had been the touch of a scorpion. He had loved alas! he loved still, this girl as his own soul. He could not forgive her the misery she was causing him; the deeper his wound the harder he steeled himself against her.

"You have deceived us all," he said, sternly. "You let my sister send you here under false pretences; you won the honest love of a good man; you moved among us daily an acting lie; and now that some fear of detection has arisen you feel some sensations of remorse. Oh, Heaven! Why do such false creatures have faces pure and true as yours! Why are you allowed to resemble angels in outward seeming!"

"I thought you would be merciful," said the girl, faintly. "I never thought you would judge me harshly."

"I am not a hero," he said, coldly. "I make no profession of being different to my fellows. You have deceived me; I would have staked my life upon your truth and innocence. You confess to me that you are a living lie—that if my cousin knew you as you are she would send you from her house! You tell me this, and you are surprised I judge you harshly."

"Yes—wearily, oh! so wearily. "You were so brave and strong, I thought you would have pity on me. There was no one in the world to help me, and I was so desolate your sister offered to send me here. Do you know that when I saw her I was almost penniless—my choice lay between Castle Dacres and—the river!"

Guy shuddered.

"And now what has changed your views! If you thought it right to come here last winter under false pretences why do you grieve now. In your case falsehood has certainly prospered. You have a happy, careful home, the love of two innocent children. What has caused your grief?"

"My views have not changed," said Lillian, slowly; "they are just the same. I always thought it wrong to come here, but I could never have sent myself away; it would be like Eve's leaving Paradise of her own accord; only I have learned to-day that detection is at hand. In a very little while my secret will be mine no longer, and Lady Dacres will send me from the Castle."

He saw an envelope lying on her lap, but he did not know that it was the handwriting of Sir Ronald Trevlyn.

"Where shall you go?"

"I do not know, the world is very wide. Mr. Ainslie, perhaps we shall never meet again. I wish you would forgive me before you go. I did not deserve your help; I ought never to have taken your sister's aid without telling her my sin; but oh! I was so miserable, so forlorn."

She stopped, choked by a little sob. Guy longed to take her in his arms, and tell her that was her refuge from all sorrow; but he was a proud man. He would not marry a woman with such a past as he believed Lillian's; he felt as miserable almost as she did; she little knew this hope she had shattered this morning.

"I wish my sister was here!"

"I wish she were. I think I should find her a kinder judge than Lady Dacres."

"Perhaps you may be alarming yourself needlessly, your fears may not be realised; your correspondent may not speak to Lady Dacres after all."

Lillian rose.

"And do you think I could stay here after what you have said respecting me to-day. I knew I was wrong, but I never guessed how wrong. If I am spared, the misery of your cousin's hearing my wretched story. I shall make some

excuse, and leave her soon. It will not be so bad as being turned out. I shall go back to London, and live my life as best I can."

There was a noble spirit shining in her eyes. Guy hesitated. Could he be mistaken, after all?

"And you will write to us?"

She shook her head.

"No!"

"But my sister——"

"I could not bear it; she was kind to me, she believed in me before. Do you think I could go to her and read my sentence in her eyes as I have in yours! Why, death itself would be better."

"And Darby!"

"What of him!"

"Has it never struck you there is a way out of your difficulties?"

"How!"

"He loves you; he is his own master, and he is just the kind of man to overlook anything in your past."

Her eyes flashed with indignation.

"How can you think so basely of me, Mr. Ainslie! You believe that I could go to your friend without one spark of love for him in my heart, and accept from him name, fortune, and affection just because I needed a husband's care! I would rather beg my bread in the streets than stoop to such a course."

Voices were heard calling Guy.

It was time to set out, everyone was waiting for him.

He turned to Lillian—

"At least promise me you will take no steps until my return. For to-day at least you are safe from any disclosures to Lady Dacres, since the post is gone. Promise me you will let things be until I return."

"To what end?"

"I think I have some claim on you," cried Guy, angrily, "or perhaps my sister has. In her name I entreat you to take no step until my return."

"I can never forget how kind you once were," said Lillian, "and by that kindness I will obey you. Unless Lady Dacres sends for me I will make no attempt to see her."

Guy rode off relieved.

Vivian, shut up with a headache, was not very likely to send for the governess.

He had at least gained a few hours for thought. If worst came to worst he would telegraph to his sister.

"She and I must never meet after she leaves here," he muttered, thinking of Lillian. "She is so fair and sweet I might forget all she has told me, and yet ask her to be my wife; but Kate has a large heart, and she does not know my secret, and she will judge my poor child mercifully."

It seemed to Guy Ainslie that each minute of that autumn morning was of more than usual length.

He talked and laughed with his companions; he answered when he was spoken to, but he did everything like a man in a dream.

He was only conscious of two things—that he loved Lillian as his own life, and she with her own lips had confessed her unworthiness.

The afternoon was well advanced when the party returned to the Castle.

Five o'clock tea was ready in the drawing-room, Lady Dacres dispensing it with her own fair hands; but Guy, whose eyes were sharpened by anxiety, noticed that she was unusually excited—her face was flushed, and a cruel smile played about her lips.

The two children in their innocence put the question Mr. Ainslie was longing to ask.

"Where is Miss Green, mamma?"

My Lady did not condescend to answer, and her husband took up the subject.

"Ah, where is the young lady, Vivian! the little ones said she had a headache."

"I am quite ignorant of her ailments," said Vivian, coldly, and speaking in a very low voice so as only to be heard by Sir John and her cousin. "Miss Green has left the Castle, and had I only known her antecedents she should never have entered it."

A painful pause followed.

The guests scattered round the room were dimly conscious something was wrong. Guy's face was stern and impenetrable. Sir John looked amazed.

No one had broken the silence when the butler entered, bearing on a silver salver one of those orange-coloured envelopes which have brought pain to so many households.

He stopped before Guy's chair.

"A telegram for you, sir."

(To be continued.)

CYNTHIA'S CRIME.

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(Continued from page 81.)

CHAPTER VII.

FIVE years had elapsed since Bertie Randolph's untimely death, years fraught with many changes for all concerned in it.

Kitty still lived at Ivy Cottage with her boy, born soon after her husband's death. But for the child she would, in all probability, have followed Bertie to the grave. Those clinging, childish hands and baby kisses; the deep blue eyes, from which Bertie's soul seemed gazing upon her, embodied in their child, roused her from the stupor of grief into which she had fallen, and drew her gently back to life and hope again.

The first tears she had shed since Bertie's death fell like rain upon the baby's face when they placed it in her arms. Perhaps those merciful tears helped to save the young widow's reason if not her life. By degrees, as the child grew older, it helped to fill the vacant place in her heart; to reconcile her to the loss she had sustained, and remove all angry, resentful feeling directed against the author of that loss, Cynthia Fontagne.

At first Kitty had deemed it impossible that she should ever forgive the woman whose pride and jealousy had cost Bertie his life, and cut his career short in the midst. But gentler, holier thoughts had come to her with the child, while the knowledge that Cynthia had suffered—nay, was even then suffering severely for the sin committed—rendered her less unwilling to forgive Harold Fontagne's wife should they ever cross each other's path again.

That seemed doubtful, however. Cynthia had left her home on the night following that terrible scene between herself and her husband, left it without informing Harold of her intention, and disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed her up. All his endeavours to trace her had proved fruitless.

Sometimes the terrible dread that she had committed suicide crossed the sculptor's mind, overwhelming him with mingled dread and remorse.

He was aware of her passionate, undisciplined temperament, her idolatrous love for himself. Had his merciless attitude upon the occasion of their last interview driven her to despair?

When his first uncontrollable anger and horror, consequent upon Bertie's death, and Kitty's only too well-grounded suspicion had had time to subside a little, when he discovered his wife's flight, he reproached himself for having dealt so severely with her.

He could not have continued to live with her, he reflected, miserably, but he might have softened the blow a little; he might have spared her those terrible reproaches, knowing as he did that her punishment could hardly have been greater. He had thrust her from him, he had refused to listen to her prayer imploring forgiveness. And what had become of her when, frenzied and forsaken, she quitted her home to throw herself upon the mercy of the world?

The sculptor had aged wonderfully since his friend's death. There were deep lines graven in his face, grey hairs were thickly sprinkled among his short, crisp brown locks. As much as possible he avoided society, and strove to engross himself

in his work—to have no hopes, no aims, no interests beyond it.

His heart cried out for the wife he had driven away from him. He hated the sin of which she had been guilty, yet he loved the beautiful sinner as well as ever. Without Cynthia life seemed a dull, tedious affair, that could not come to an end too quickly. He missed her more and more as the months and years went by, bringing him fame and pecuniary success, but little joy. The suspense and uncertainty he endured with regard to her fate; the conviction that, if living, she must be in a state of poverty and destitution, from which he was powerless to rescue her, since she made no sign, haunted him by day and night, and rendered his life one long unbroken regret.

Kitty Randolph regarded him compassionately when he came to pay her a visit. She knew what he suffered, and had it been in her power to restore Cynthia to him, to effect a reconciliation between the husband and wife, she would have done so, certain that such a proceeding on her part would have met with Bertie's approval.

Want of money was no longer to be numbered among Kitty's troubles. Without exposing his wife's dishonourable conduct in interesting the latter, Harold Fontagne had given the Earl of Roxburgh to understand that Bertie Randolph's death was mainly owing to the disappointment he had sustained with regard to the mausoleum. This fact having been brought under his notice, the sculptor expressed himself unwilling to execute the commission which had caused a brother artist his life, pointing out at the same time the surpassing beauty of the work Bertie had prepared for the mausoleum.

The Earl, shocked and sorry, expressed his willingness to avail himself of the dead sculptor's talent, and to pay his widow liberally for it if Harold Fontagne would consent to complete the unfinished work, and supply all that was lacking to render the mausoleum unique in its beauty, a marble poem, commemorative of more than one sad life story now.

Putting aside his own ambition without a regret, Harold Fontagne had agreed to perfect his friend's work, to give it the most prominent place, rendering his own subservient to it, a noble piece of self-sacrifice, which placed Kitty and her son beyond the reach of want and won posthumous fame for her husband. His lovely creations, wrought while he was in a fever of hope and anticipation, and the rejection of which had broken his heart, were destined to arouse admiration in the breasts of thousands, long after the hand that shaped them lay mouldering in the grave. Bertie had triumphed through the friend who felt he could not do enough to atone for the wrong so unconsciously committed at the instigation of another.

"Have you received any tidings?" Kitty would ask, when they met, without mentioning Cynthia's name. And the sculptor always shook his head, while the sorrow and longing in his eyes grew deeper.

"I never shall receive any," he said, abruptly, on one occasion. "I believe she is dead."

But Cynthia was not dead, only hidden securely from all who knew her, from all she most loved and yearned for. A great gulf yawned between her and the fair, golden past, a gulf of her own creating.

She had left her husband's house in a state of mind bordering upon insanity, conscious only of a wild longing to escape, to avoid a repetition of those unwelcome reproaches which Harold had heaped upon her in his wrath.

Since he had refused to forgive her, to take her back to his heart, she would not permit him to maintain her, or to learn what had become of her.

The idea that she had become hateful to him was strong upon her when, guilty and miserable, she quitted her home and bade a long good-bye to the soft, pampered, easeful existence she had known there.

The consciousness that she had been instrumental in causing Bertie Randolph's death through her unprincipled action, the loss of her husband's love, and the complete separation from him that ensued, proved almost too much for her reason.

Retribution in Cynthia's case had not lattered upon the road. It had overtaken her swiftly. The mere fact of finding herself alone in the world, suddenly isolated from all her previous surroundings, was in itself a terrible experience for one who had always been rose-lined from the cold. In the spirit, if not in the letter, she was a murderess, she told herself a thousand times during those first days of utter prostration and bitter repentance!

But for her Bertie Randolph would not have died. She had killed him as surely as if she had stabbed or shot him; the bright, handsome young fellow who had been the first to salute her upon her wedding day, whose face, as she had last seen it, looking glad and radiant, was still so fresh in her memory.

Since her husband, the man who had loved her best upon earth, found it impossible to forgive her perfidious conduct, what hope was there that Heaven would pardon such a crime?

Cynthia's nature was not without its redeeming aspects. Some nobler traits characterised it, although it had required a tremendous upheaval to enable them to break through the thick crust of pride, indolence, and overweening jealous ambition beneath which they had lain hidden.

She regretted not merely the consequences of her sin as they affected herself after the manner of some penitents, so-called. She loathed and hated that sin now that its deadly nature stood revealed. She did not attempt to palliate or lessen it. She had killed Bertie Randolph through her inability to estimate the effects of disappointment and treachery upon his sensitive, impressionable temperament, and nothing remained for her but a life-long repentance.

After a time it became necessary to rouse herself, to consider the imperative question of ways and means. Even the obscure dingy lodging she had hired must be paid for, and her money was growing short. She must do something in order to earn a living. In what direction should she, so unused to roughing it, make her first venture?

She felt no inclination to return to West London. For one thing, her aunt was dead; for another, were she to go there Harold would probably seek her out, and insist upon making suitable provision for her.

Out of her late but earnest repentance and sorrow had arisen a desire to do something for the good of others, to devote her life to the sick or the sinful, in part atonement for the wrong she had committed.

And this desire was the more praiseworthy since Cynthia had no natural tendency in the direction of things hard, unpleasant, and self-sacrificing.

Her indolent, luxurious, Oriental temperament, accustomed to unlimited homage, loving all that was rich and beautiful, likely to minister to her comfort, rendered her averse to scenes of squalor and suffering, to voluntary privation.

Consequently her resolve to brave the difficulties ahead, to choose a life of self-abnegation and hard unflinching work, had in it the germs of a true heartfelt repentance, destined to bear rich fruit in the future.

Believing that in time, after careful training, she would become a good nurse, Cynthia gained admittance as a probationer at St. Thomas's Hospital, and entered upon her duties, firmly bent upon fulfilling them to the best of her ability, however distasteful they might prove. She would then be earning her own living, while she would be doing her best to mitigate the sufferings of others.

The stately, beautiful, well-bred woman, of whose past history they knew so little, soon became a favourite with both doctors and patients. She seemed to have no interests in life beyond her nursing, which could hardly have been more skilful and tender.

Having passed through the various probationary stages, Cynthia became a qualified nurse, in charge of the accident ward, a place requiring strong nerves and brave hearts to endure the sad sights that had so frequently to be witnessed there.

Many a struggle had Cynthia had between duty and inclination ere she reached this stage; many a time the fierce longing to throw herself at her husband's feet again, and implore his for-

givenness anew, to press her lips to his in a kiss of despairing, concentrated love as he could thrust her from him, had well-nigh torn her asunder.

But she had resisted it, believing Harold to be as much incensed as ever against her, and accepted her punishment as part of the penance it behoved her to fulfil.

One day Harold Fontagne, coming from the House of Commons, where he had been listening to an important debate, slipped in crossing the muddy road, and fell just under the wheels of a passing omnibus.

They carried him to the hospital, and in the bruised, senseless heap of humanity thus suddenly brought under her notice Cynthia recognised her husband.

For once her self-possession deserted her. She fell on her knees beside the stretcher with a low, wailing cry.

"You know him!" said the doctor, interrogatively.

"He is my husband!" replied Cynthia, pillow Harold's unconscious head upon her breast. "And we have been parted for years."

At first death seemed likely to part them for a still longer term. Harold Fontagne had several ribs broken, besides a fractured arm, and a bad scalp wound. It was an interesting surgical case—from the doctors' not the patient's point of view. They put him together again as skillfully and carefully as if he had been a Chinese puzzle in several places.

A small room was placed at his disposal apart from the common ward, and Cynthia, whose recognition of the patient as her husband had invested her with new interest in the eyes of all connected with the hospital, was allowed to nurse him.

A more devoted, tireless nurse Harold Fontagne could not possibly have had. While the fever and delirium lasted she ministered to his every want, feeling thankful for the privilege thus accorded her, a privilege which she told herself sadly must cease as soon as her husband regained consciousness.

She no longer doubted the forgiveness of Heaven; that had come to her, together with a sense of chastened peace, and submission to her lot. But she did not venture to hope that Harold would ever forgive her sin.

Rather than see him turn coldly away from her again, she would leave him when reason was on the point of returning, and go back to her other patients, although this meeting with him had opened the old wounds in her heart, and caused them to bleed afresh.

In that dim twilight of semi-consciousness which frequently precedes the full dawn of reason after long and dangerous illness, Harold Fontagne became aware of a familiar presence hovering round him, a presence inexpressibly soothing and grateful, that seemed to anticipate his slightest wish ere he could give utterance to it.

What had he lost which had been thus inexplicably restored to him, imparting a sense of supreme rest and happiness? Then as the power of connected thought returned, the gracious ministering presence resolved itself into Cynthia. She was with him again. How this had come to pass he cared but little in his weakness. The glad fact was sufficient in itself; his wife still lived, and he had found her.

Waking one day from a long refreshing sleep the sculptor felt a kiss lightly imprinted on his forehead as he lay there with closed eyes, in dreamy luxurious idleness. Fully conscious, he glanced up and beheld his wife bending over him.

She shrank back and would have fled as he recognised her in her shame and sorrow. He put out his hand quickly and detained her.

"Cynthia, my wife!"

There was no anger in the voice that uttered these words, only love and pity. As Cynthia heard them she fell upon her knees beside him.

"Harold, can you forgive me now?" she cried impudently. "I had intended to leave you when you regained consciousness lest you should thrust me from you again. I will go if you tell me to do so, only forgive me first, that I may suffer less in the lonely years yet to come."

He drew her towards him and kissed the

beautiful face which had gained so much in softness and gentle womanly grace of expression. If she were less imperiously lovely than of old she had become infinitely more lovable. Sorrow and suffering had proved themselves to be Cynthia's good angels in disguise.

"Darling, I trust that we shall both obtain forgiveness," he whispered, regarding her with the old fond look of love. "I judged you too harshly. You could not foresee the terrible result of that one wrong act which has cost us both so dear. Cynthia, now that I have found you we must never part again. I know that as long as you live you will never cease to regret poor Bertie's death. Why should I add to your sorrow and my own by refusing to forgive?"

With a little sobbing cry Cynthia flung herself into the arms outstretched to receive her, and rested there like a weary storm-beaten bird that had found its haven of rest when it least expected to do so.

Husband and wife were united again, never to part until they reached the threshold of that new glad life beyond the grave, where sin and sorrow and parting are unknown.

[THE END]

FOUND WANTING.

—10—

CHAPTER XXV.

At the very time that Pelham Chifford was leaving the house, and Christine, after receiving Sir William Buresford, the great physician, had gone down to the kitchen, Delmar awoke from a restless sleep, through which he never lost the sensation of acute pain, to see the two physicians standing beside him. Dr. Hall he knew—the other was strange to him.

By this time he recollected clearly all that had happened to him. The most passive member of his own house, he had nothing to do but to submit to their examination, and to answer as best he could one or two questions; he did not feel particularly interested—he only wished they would let him alone; and yet all the time he was unconsciously taking note of their looks and few words to each other.

They said very little to him. Then they went out, and the room was very still; the mellow sunlight was shining in through lowered blinds and lace curtains, and the shadows of waving leaves danced across the opposite wall. No one was to be seen—there was a watcher, of course, but Delmar was much too unwilling to move to care to know who it was.

He lay watching the waving shadows and flitting lights, indifferent to time or place, or outward things at all—perhaps still not fully alive to them. Inwardly, in some respects, it was much the same. He could think of Pelham; recall, though with difficulty, what had passed in the lane—how long ago he had not the faintest idea—with a curious coolness. All his passion seemed burnt out. The same as regarded even Maddie. She came into his mind but did not stir it.

None of these thoughts—if such they could be called, where all was so confused and blurred—held him long. He was thinking of what those doctors said, and how they looked. Why had this stranger come—what did it mean? Was he so very ill—did they think he would die?

He had never thought of death—he had been so strong, so free from the lightest ailments. Once he had half wished to die—he could not recollect when, but connected it vaguely with an endless day, and something he wanted with an aching longing. But now the thought of death, the conviction that they all believed he must die, sent a cold thrill of fear through his shrinking soul. It was so easy to wish when the wish could not produce the result—but to be helpless and know the inexorable hand was stretched out to him—that no cry or prayer could avert it—to have a terrible sense of his own distinct, undying individuality—this was scarcely to be borne.

The gentle opening of the door for an instant diverted his thoughts, and as he saw who it was he turned aside, so that she might think he slept—he could not bear a word from her just then. Christine said something to Evans, who had been in the room, and as the man went out she began filling some china bowls with the flowers she had been gathering.

She had just heard Sir William's opinion, and his compliance with Dr. Hall's wish that he should stay till the evening—the longest time he could spare—returning on the morrow. Her fingers might not be quite steady, but that was all—she was, perhaps, numbed by all she had gone through within these few days. She only felt as if her one refuge was within these four walls.

Callers there were in plenty this morning. Christine saw none of them; but she was touched and grateful. Little enough had been done to arouse so much kindly feeling, she thought—it would have been no wonder if few had cared whether the master of Danewood lived or died. She did not know that half the interest was in herself.

Dr. Hall and Christine were the nurses—it was quite sufficient, the doctors had agreed significantly; and before the day was out both agreed also that she was a born nurse and indispensable. The only words Delmar uttered were an imploring "Don't move me!" when they brought him food, and repeated it when they urged him. But Christine came, and he made no farther resistance, whatever his longing for quiet.

Dr. Hall said she was a witch, but she shook her head—she had understood that quick submission—it was not the magic of love that had conquered. From that time, however, Dr. Hall at least saw she was invaluable. They thought their patient was sometimes half unconscious, he was so still, and began to hope the dreaded fever might be averted.

No one knew how he counted the hours—how he watched the corners of the room fill with shadows and the light fade, as the weary, wretched day drew to a close, and the night drew on—the dreaded night. Through the tumult of his own thoughts he heard soft good-nights, and reading stops, and gently closing doors. Someone remained—someone who knew how long he could live—someone who could tell him the truth—and then he bit his lip to stave the almost irrepressible moan.

In truth he had his punishment—it had begun that day; and in the still mysterious hours, when others within that luxurious house and in the hundred homes around slept peacefully, his unsleeping eyes saw himself as he was. The scales had fallen, and the mists rolled away—something of the clearness of vision of the dying, of the power to see truth as it is seldom seen in the full strong life, to weigh with just balance—something of all this came to him.

He was so near the border-land that he hardly saw with earthly eyes. What wonder after such a night that the little strength remaining to him ebbed slowly away? That terrible word, "sinking," passed between the two doctors, and it was repeated to all who came to inquire. There were prayers in the little church in the village for "Albert Delmar, apparently dying," and Christine sent for her brother to be at hand.

She never failed—she, who had more reason than all to weep—she, who saw her darling going alone, silent, into the dark valley, showing only he remembered—she was sure of nothing else. He was past speech—she could only try to believe that the prayers daily said by the priest when he came might bear fruit. He heard them, felt the hand laid in blessing on his head, and gave no sign—how could prayer or benediction help him who had defied Heaven—how could a wasted, reckless life be atoned for by a few days' repentance?

From first to last, from boyhood to this hour, he had followed his own way, regardless of others; impulse and will always clashing, and the will conquering the purer impulse; the very altar profaned by false vows, himself unfaithful in heart; Heaven's own prerogative of vengeance usurped, and a woman—the one woman he was sworn to

cherish—deliberately made the instrument of the cowardly revenge he had cast into the balance against his own soul and her happiness. There was no pardon for this—neither from Heaven or man. He dared not ask it—he might wish his life undone; he might long to have some time for expiation, to make some little reparation to this girl-wife from whose lightest caress he shrank, and yet whose absence for a minute he felt; but it was too late. The time had been granted him—that long year—some rays of light had been granted him, and he had looked back into the darkness—nay, long ago, before this last and worse sin of all the many that had stained his life, his own mother had been sent to stay him; and he would not hear even her. The old love that had tempted him on to sin so deeply, that he had held to even when a bride's hand lay in his—what had it been worth!—what place had it in these awful hours!

Could Maddle help him—was a year of Maddle's love worth a minute of hers who had overlooked such deep wrongs, whose love had never died! He knew it by her very touch, and even that thought was no relief—it only deepened his shame to anguish. He had flung away the jewel he might have worn—flung away his own soul—more precious than even this matchless woman-love—for the bauble that could only glitter in the light—that had no rays pure and strong enough to shine through the shadows.

Hardly a word had passed between husband and wife—he had scarcely met her eyes once—yet it was her voice, her touch that had in them some magic; it was her hand that in his fevered wanderings would hold his for hours, and never grow weary. Through this long struggle of the young life that could not yield at once, she was serenely bright and brave—her tears must wait while others had to be sustained.

But one night there came a change. Soft and low those last solemn prayers had sounded through the room, and the priest had left, and the doctor had gone to lie down, for he had done all he could, and only the wife remained—nothing could take her from this dying bed. She almost fancied she could hear her brother's step below, up and down in silence, broken only by the laboured breath that each minute seemed drawn with more effort. Then the low whisper she had not heard for days uttered her name,—

"Christine!"

She rose directly, understanding his look, and sitting down on the bed put one arm about him, raising his head to her shoulder. She did not speak—perhaps she could not just then, brave as she was. He did not move—there was creeping over him such a strange, soft feeling, such as he had never known since he was a boy, and after some wild fit of passion he would lean on his mother's breast and wish he were good like her. There was no bitterness left in him now—only a wish he had done differently, and a longing for rest. He was so weary of storm and conflict.

And Christine—well, there was some sweetness even in this moment—he seemed all her own.

Presently he whispered,—

"Pelham—is he here?"

"Yes—do you want him? He is downstairs."

She took his silence for assent, and touched the little bell at her hand. Fanny, waiting in her mistress's dressing-room, knew what that bell meant, and going straight down, told Clifford to go up at once, and, preceding him, ushered him into the room. He had waited for this summons, had more than half known it must come. All the household knew the master could scarcely live till daylight—but when the door had closed behind Pelham his trembling limbs would scarcely support him. Christine, lifting her eyes, seeing him for the first time since their last interview, grew a shade paler, and involuntarily drew her arm closer round Delmar. He, lying with closed eyes, did not seem to notice Pelham was there at the bedside.

"Albert," the girl said gently, "Pelham is here—he is waiting."

Delmar lifted his head with a half start, and a quick-drawn breath. Clifford, white to the lips stood looking at him. Such a wreck of the splendid strength that had been a match for his

own a week ago—so beautiful still with the exquisite beauty of form that even the anguish of pain could not alter—with the dying light in the deep blue eyes, and the curved lips a little parted as if he would speak, but speech was arrested. Then slowly he put out one hand towards Clifford. Clifford's closed over it with a passionate force; and he looked down at the white hand lying in his, light as a child's might be—the hand that had been so strong in the old happy college days, and a deep sob burst from him.

"Albert, Albert—would to Heaven I could die for you!" he said, and the tears rolled down his face.

A troubled look came into the fair face—he half pulled Clifford down towards him, and he, understanding, bent lower, and kissed him.

Slowly after that he went out, and Christine never looked towards him, keeping his face bent down, trembling a little when he sobbed. That tremor had not passed even when he had gone, and husband and wife were again alone. She asked the question,—

"Is there no one else you would like to see?"

"No!"

"Nor send a message to? I will take it faithfully, darling."

Again his lips just formed the word "No!" there was no sound.

"Not to Maddle!" she said, tremulously; "she would like to have one word."

It had been such a brave effort; she felt him move a little, but he only closed his eyes again, and made no answer.

There was a long silence—how long she never knew—she took no count of it—she had no thought of the future, no memory of the past. To die so, in her arms, to cling to her at the last, to know she loved him still as he knew it now—that was something—that could be weighed against all the lovelessness and outweight it. But she had a fuller reward than this. With a sudden movement he half raised himself, and her quick terror sank before the look that met her—so yearning and sorrowful were those uplifted eyes, so soft with heavy tears—they only meant one thing—she only felt that her prayers had been answered, and stooping, pressed her lips on his in a long, close kiss. And the night went silently by, and then paused, waiting for the dawn.

CHAPTER XXV

It was yet early the next morning when Sir William Beresford came along the lane from the station, and entered Danewood by the side gate, dropping the latch with a gentle click. Then his glance went at once to the house. The morning sun lay warm and bright on that side, but every blind was up. Puzzled and doubtful, the surgeon went on to the door, when Colin came bounding up, and the next minute Christine, with the light breeze blowing her curly hair into confusion, followed the dog.

"I had not hoped to see that," were the doctor's first words as he shook hands, and he glanced to the windows, "nor you here. How is our patient?"

"Dr. Hall insists that he is a shade better. I could hardly believe it, and yet I thought so myself. He is sleeping now, so Dr. Hall made me come out here for half-an-hour."

"I never thought it possible," said Sir William. "Were you with him?"

"Yes, all night. Dr. Hall did all he could early in the night, and went to lie down. I was to call him if there was any change. Later Albert asked to see my brother. He only stayed a few minutes, and then we were alone. I think just a few words passed, then he seemed very quiet, and I thought it would end so—I did not think he could go through till morning. What I first noticed—and I was watching him—was his breathing getting so regular—like a child's when it sleeps. Then I was sure he was sleeping. It was past six when Dr. Hall came in," she bent down over the dog as she went on. "He said directly there was a change."

"Had you thought so yourself?"

"Yes—but I had hardly dared to credit it. His pulse was stronger, and there was less fever. About an hour ago we thought he was waking, and laid him back on the pillows—I think he just murmured something, and went off again. Will you go up or wait? It was so kind of you to come so early. I meant to have sent to the next train."

"The walk was very pleasant, and your good news still more so."

"Ah," said Christine, sadly, "it is but a shade—there is so much to battle through yet."

"He is young and strong—a fine constitution—you ought to be more hopeful. Come, and let me see if I agree with my colleague. I have generally done so."

Very gently doctor and nurse passed into the darkened room. Christine just moved the blind, so that, without its falling on the sleeper, there was a trifle more light. Those who had seen him only in perfect health, or even a few days ago, would have been unable to imagine he could ever look like this. There was a curiously peaceful look on the delicate face, enhanced by the subdued light; not the child's peace, but that deeper peace that comes after a storm; one hand had been pushed amongst the sunny hair, lying in rings on the brow, the other thrown out over the coverlid; there was a perfect repose and grace in every line of face and form.

The two doctors stood looking down on him, Christine a little drawn back, where she could see all three, but it was on the quiet sleeper her eyes dwelt longest; for him her heart was full of a passionate thankfulness and a trembling fear.

"A very slight improvement," said Sir William, turning away at last, "but it is not our doing, Dr. Hall; we gave him up. Keep the room dark, my dear, and the house quiet—I wouldn't wake him for a mine of gold."

Everyone knows what the slightest glimpse of hope means when a beloved life stands at the gates of death, and we know not whether those gates will open or close. Slight as the hope was, it relieved the pressure that was not felt by anyone to be so hard till that relief came.

Pelham, calling from the inn at which he had taken up his quarters, was told by Mrs. Forster that the doctors gave some faint hope, and went away half-frenzied with the sudden lifting from blank despair. He could only wander through the lanes, and forget to telegraph to Maddle, as he had promised when he left town last.

It was late in morning before Delmar woke—woke with the sense he had not known for months, that some load had been removed; the delicious vagueness of the feeling was half its charm. And before he had time to collect himself his unwearied attendants were about him, redoubling, if that were possible, their care.

Looking back on that day, as she, in the evening, paused for a minute by the hall door opening wide to the lawn, Christine could feel unutterably thankful. Danger was not past—could not be for days; the life that hung in such slight balance they held still by a too slender thread—but the day had been full of wondrous peace. With a heart quiet and relieved, she stole upstairs. She had need of that strengthening, for plenty of anxiety lay before her.

Slow, faltering, with a hundred fluctuations, raising their hopes one day, to sink them low the next, Delmar almost perplexed his doctors. The rally was at first so imperceptible they began to fear it was only the precursor to a relapse—and that would be fatal.

The strange thing was he seemed to make so little effort of his own will—he did not help them. Seldom uttering a word, or even making a request, generally thanking those about him only by a look or a faint smile, he was a perfect patient—too perfect to be natural, Dr. Hall thought.

Impulsive as he was, he ought, with the first hint of renewed strength, to have shown some pleasure, to have even been a little unmanageable—anything was better than that implicit submission, as if he had no wish in the world. Was there some complication such as had been feared?—yet no trace of that could they find.

Dr. Hall had long ago decided that there was something on Delmar's mind—aye, and that there had been a mental strain, for perhaps months

before this accident. It was useless to probe the question yet—there must be a little more strength first. And what there was seemed well-nigh exhausted when they at last extracted the bullet—it was a difficult business, and for days afterwards Delmar could not rally.

Again the hours passed in alternate hope and fear, till the doctors ventured to announce they thought the danger was passed.

"I think you will do now," said Sir William, one morning, with a beaming countenance.

"I have been an awful trouble," said Delmar, in a slow, languid way.

"You would be none at all if you wouldn't think. If you tried to talk too much we could stop that, but thinking—it's impossible. Just remember you have nothing to do but to get well as quickly as you can. Of course, you are out-raging science, but I'll forgive you for that for the relief it will be to that sweet wife of yours. Well, I shall come again to-morrow."

The cheery surgeon departed, and thought that he left comfort behind him. Christine was very doubtful how far the reprieve was looked on in the light of comfort, but it was impossible to get at his real mind. She came to say good-night, it being Evans's turn to play night nurse, and Delmar turned half eagerly towards her, with brighter eyes than she cared to see.

"Don't you remember what was told you to-day?" she said, smiling. "I've only come to say good-night. What have you been thinking of all day to look as you do—so tired! Can't you be glad?"

"Glad—for life?" he said, wearily.

"Not a month ago you lay here waiting for death," the girl answered, very gently; "do you think we want to lose you?"

He looked up at her steadily, then turned slightly aside. The look, the action, spoke so plainly, that the girl's heart throbbed fast and heavy.

She could not utter the words that would have come naturally to a wife's lips—assurances of love—even a soft reproach; for why should he care to live—bound to her, his heart far away! What could life be to him—and oh, what to her!

"Good-night," she said, unsteadily; she knew her lips, too, were trembling, and he must feel they were.

He held her hand.

"Mayn't I ask one question about Pelham?"

"He is staying at the Inn," she said; "the rector asked him to stay with him, but he would not—it is too far. He comes several times a day; but to-day he went to town, and will be back early to-morrow, or perhaps to-night. Now I will go."

But he still held her.

"I want to know—did he tell you how it all happened—about those letters you never had?"

"Pelham told me himself," she said; "but, indeed, Albert, you must not talk any more. Good-night, again. When you are stronger you shall know more."

"Will you tell Pelham yourself?" he asked, earnestly, suffering her to loosen his clasp. The question was totally unexpected, and the girl looked at him for a second, unable to gather herself together. He meant so much more than his words.

"I don't know," she said, hurriedly. "I can't tell, and here is Evans."

Evans paused respectfully, seeing his young mistress—she bade both master and servant good-night, avoiding looking towards the former, and passed into the dressing-room, and threw herself on the couch without even removing her dress.

"He means he does not want to come between Pelham and me," she said. "He wants me to forgive—I may do that, though it is so hard—but it can never again be as it was between us. And yet, how can I say that of one and not the other? They were both to me above reproach. I should have hated myself to think one of them could fall. They have failed—disappointed me—shaken my faith—and yet I love them—yet I could be happier if only there was no one between Albert and me. How can I blame him now! We can't forget love because we ought to—duty is

not all-conquering to any of us. What wonder life seems to him so hard—such an endless struggle! What can I do to lighten it! I could go away again—when he no longer needs me. But I can't think of that yet, and he must not hear a word to agitate him—he is keeping himself back now."

She lay still a minute, perhaps fighting a silent battle with herself, then got up quickly.

"If I give way he will be pleased,—it will lighten the burden a little. Oh! how can I hesitate when it is for him—when it is all I can do for him? I wonder if Pelham will come to-night!"

She went to the window—it was a fine, clear night, a little sharp—and throwing a scarf about her, she went out by the door to the passage, and crept downstairs.

The last train could be only just in—for it was not yet eleven o'clock; no one sitting up late during this time of constant work and anxiety.

If she waited at the gate she must see Pelham pass if he came. She unclipped the hall door quietly, left it ajar, and passed down the garden, across the grass to the wicket-gate. There she stood turning her face towards the long stretch of darkened road which led to the station.

It was very still, and the wind came low and chilly through the trees. She shivered a little, more than half in a sort of excitement.

Far away she thought she heard a step—a step that seemed at first to lag and then came on briskly. Nearer it came, more distinct—a man's step—how well she knew it! A shadowy figure passed in and out among the trees in the road, was nearing the gate, had almost passed it.

"Pelham!" she said, under her breath.

Clifford turned his head swiftly towards the sound he felt more than he heard.

"Good heavens—Christine!" was all he could say, with that deadly paralysed feeling coming over him again.

She broke open the latch, and threw back the gate—drawing him into the garden.

"No—nothing has happened—he is going on well, thank Heaven! I wanted to tell you myself what they said this morning."

"What!" he asked, hoarsely; "will he live? Is it true that I am to be free from blood?"

She threw herself into his arms, and he, dazed and scarcely comprehending, held her close to him. It was all he could do—the one thought swallowed up all others; it was not joy, not relief, not thankfulness unutterable, and yet made up of all these, and a deep awe.

"Is it true?" he repeated, at last, looking upwards, as if he must hear the answer from divine, not human lips.

"Yes—yes," the girl answered, trembling still; "and he asked me to tell you—he could not endure for us to be parted for him—oh, Pel, bear with me!"

"With you!" he said, passionately; "I understood you—but it was part of my punishment. You have suffered more than we—but Heaven does send reward even on this miserable earth. You will have yours—for me I wish—"

"No—wish nothing," she said, quickly; "we may be happier yet."

"Some wounds never heal, Christine—and I have wounded you."

"I know—I know—there is so little light—so little," she said, pressing her hands together; "step by step—one cannot tell what the next may be. But I am talking wildly. Kiss me, Pelham—I could not let you last time."

A kiss may speak like words—this that he gave was not like that of the light-hearted days when there had been no pain but the pain of parting—no shadow on the joy of reunion. But it had its own sweetness—the sweetness that walks hand in hand with suffering; they could be thankful for that at least.

Christine thought her effort rewarded when the next morning she told Albert she had seen Pelham, and the thanks she got was only a smile—but a smile she never forgot.

Clifford came up to see Delmar that morning, staying but a few minutes—neither could have borne much more. Not a word was said about Maddle—her name was not even mentioned.

Christine began to think this alliance was almost cruel—to long to break it, but Albert gave no opportunity, and she could not make one. He must be wondering how Maddle had borne the time—so much alone, feeling herself the cause of it all—he might be conjecturing and fearing a thousand things.

She took heart of grace one day and managed skillfully to introduce Maddle's name to Mrs. Forster, who was in the room. She let drop in a careless way that Maddle was well—she would not be so lonely now Mr. Clifford had gone home, &c.; but she dared do no more than that, and did not know how Delmar had taken it.

The constraint growing up only increased with his slowly returning strength. While he lay on the threshold of death there was no future to think of—but with the return of life came the returning future, and the necessity to face its possibilities.

It was in his mind incessantly—this long life that might be before them—what they were to do with it! Forgiveness he had—for what could efface the keen recollection of the kiss he firmly believed had saved him from death!—and love—but not the love she had once given him. It was not possible.

Her unwearied devotion, her tenderness, her constant thought for him, even yet he could scarcely bear, though they fastened his heart to her with more than the passion of gratitude that he could only express by the utter quiescence which half-veiled Dr. Hall.

He watched her moving about, sitting working beside him, and counted almost the minutes of her absence, always in his heart the same looking back with wild, unavailing regret, the same tracing over of each step that might have been different, calling up into life again each look and word that had hurt her and dishonoured him. No, she could never be happy with him—let her do as she would—it was just.

"Just a week after you ought to be there," said Dr. Hall, when at last they got him for a few hours to the sofa; "I want to get you abroad before the cold we may expect after Christmas; but you'll never be strong enough if you don't get on faster."

He gave a keen look at his refractory patient, which Delmar purposely would not meet. He felt himself change colour, though he covered the weakness with a slight smile.

"I must have tired you all out," he said, apologetically; "you'd much better have let me go."

"Perhaps you would have preferred it?" said the doctor, again scanning the other's face.

"Perhaps," was the answer, that might mean anything.

"Well, I suppose your time isn't yet—only," said Dr. Hall, shaking hands, cordially, "just let me tell you in all seriousness that if you don't make some effort now you will never be the same again. Anything may lay hold of a man in your state. Good-bye."

Left alone, for Christine went down with the doctor, Delmar took up the book at his side, turned a few pages impatiently, tossed it aside, and covered his face. And Christine below was saying to Dr. Hall,—

"You are right—I knew you thought so. There is something on his mind, and I am not sure it can ever be entirely removed. To do so even partially was impossible until he got a little strength. I will do what I can—he will not say a word. I warn you it will agitate him."

"He can bear that now. The fact is, he gives me the impression that he has nothing he cares to live for, which puzzles me, with you for his wife," he finished, smiling.

"I will do what I can," she repeated, and went back sorrowfully. She had set herself a task she was not sure she could fulfil, and of which she had dreaded the result—but the fiat of the doctor was a terrible alternative—and, besides, the strained relations were becoming insupportable. Nothing to care to live for—was it true! Did he still cling, with a love he strove to conquer but could not, to the haunting memory of pretty, careless, childish Maddle!

(To be continued.)

A THANKLESS SON.

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"Yes," said Uncle Sam, rubbing the palms of his hands together, "I really think it will be a match; and I'm very glad of it. A nice, straight, cherry-cheeked girl, with eyes as black as jet—a girl that has a fair notion of a batch of bread, and can make a pudding with anybody. I couldn't wish Jack a better wife."

"Some folks has all the luck," said Farmer Jones, whose son was married to a pretty slattern who read novels all day, and had no more idea of housekeeping than the kittens that frisked on the hearth.

"It ain't luck," said Uncle Sam, "it's brains—that's what it is."

And his wrinkled visage beamed with satisfaction as he stood there under the great feathery elm that shadowed the farmyard gate, thinking what a model wife Mildred Steele would make for his only son.

It had been the pride of Samuel Blythe's life to make his farm the model farm of the neighbourhood; and when his son came of age he formally made it over to him.

"It's for Jack's sake I've been making it what it is," said he. "Let him go on with it now."

"But, father—"

Samuel Blythe laid his hand softly on Jack's shoulder.

"My boy," said he, in a voice that faltered a little, "what object in life have I beyond your happiness? Bring home a nice, stirring little wife; carry on the farm as I have begun it, and shall be happy."

"You are the best father in the world!" cried the young man, fervently.

Farmer Jones trudged home with a setting of Jack Spanish eggs in a hand-basket, and Samuel Blythe strolled leisurely along the lane, his hands behind his back, his eyes bent meditatively on the fresh grass, when suddenly the sound of voices behind the vine-draped stone wall at the left reached his ear—Jack's voice, and that of Annie Moore, the pretty little distant cousin who did the house-work and kept the family stockings darned.

"Don't, Jack!" said Annie. "There—you've split all my blackberries!"

"Oh, bother the blackberries!" interjected Jack; "I can easily get some more. Here, Annie, let me carry the basket!"

"But—your father wouldn't like it!"

"Give it to me! I will have it! Why shouldn't he like it, puss!"

"Because—you know, Jack—Mills."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Jack, cavalierly. "As if Mills Steele were half as pretty as you! That's right—don't shrink away so. Aren't we cousins?"

And the cheery young voices died away among the bushes.

Uncle Sam stood quite motionless, his hands still clasped behind his back, his eyes still rooted on the grass, but the expression of his countenance had altered altogether.

"It won't do," he muttered to himself. "It will never do in the world. This little blue-eyed mite of a thing is going to spoil all my plans. At this rate I must send her to Cousin Martha Bowden's."

And the very next day Annie Moore was ruthlessly given notice to quit.

"Have I done anything wrong, Uncle Sam?" questioned Annie, looking wistfully up into her relative's face.

"No, my dear, no," said Uncle Sam, twisting himself about rather guiltily. "But old Mrs. Bowden has the rheumatism badly, and perhaps you can be made useful there. Jack will soon be married, you know, and—"

Annie's lips quivered; the tears sparkled into her eyes.

"Oh, Uncle Sam, are they really engaged?"

"Well, no, not quite. But the next thing to it," said Uncle Sam. "It's an understood thing between 'em."

Now this was trenching on the absolute truth of the question, but Uncle Sam had an idea that it would not do to mince matters just at present.

The girl's sweet, flower-like face fell instantaneously.

"I—I will go to Cousin Martha's," she said, in a low voice. "I'm only sorry I hadn't known before!"

And Uncle Sam felt particularly guilty as he kissed her and wished her good-bye.

All this business was diplomatically transacted in Jack Blythe's absence, and when he came home from town with a pretty little churn which he had somewhere picked up for Annie, the girl was gone.

"Where's Annie?" demanded the young farmer, looking around in bewilderment.

"Gone to stay a spell at Cousin Martha Bowden's," said Uncle Sam, glibly. "They needed her there, and so she's gone."

"And left no word for me?"

"No," said Uncle Sam. But he knew that the monosyllable cut Jack to the heart.

They were married, of course. Pretty Mildred Steele was exactly the girl to comprehend the situation, and make the most of her advantages. And Jack in his desponding mood, succumbed to fate, and "supposed it might as well be Mills as any one else."

"Talk about circumstances," said Uncle Sam. "Any man can mould circumstances to suit himself, if only he has a little tact."

And he rubbed his hands more gleefully than ever.

But as the days rolled by Uncle Sam began to doubt the efficacy of his charm.

"I really think, Father Blythe," said the bride, with a toss of the head encircled by the black, shining braids, "that you're making an unnecessary fuss over that toothache of yours."

"An—unnecessary fuss!" repeated Uncle Sam, in dismay.

"Old folks hadn't ought to be so fretful and exacting," went on Mills. "It isn't Christian; and I, for one, won't bear it. If you can't sit quiet and peaceable by the fire, I think you had better stay in your own room."

And Mrs. Mildred frowned into the kitchen to turn the batch of cake in the oven before it should burn.

Samuel Blythe rose slowly and went up to his room. If he had been a familiar student of Shakespeare, he might have quoted to himself the old passage, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" But he was not a literary man, and kept his thoughts and troubles in his own bosom.

"Jack doesn't feel so," he told himself. "Jack has little compassion on his old father yet."

But that very evening, when he came groping down into the kitchen to get some mustard for his aching face, he heard Mildred conferring with her husband in the adjoining sitting-room.

"It's no use talking," said Mrs. Blythe, junior, in an excited sort of way, "and I shan't stand it any longer, that's positive. There's a very good vacancy in the Home at Oldhampton, and it's the only place he's fit for."

"Perhaps you are right, my dear," said Jack, ruefully. For, big six footer though he was, he stood in mortal fear of his slim, black-eyed wife. "I dare say they'll make him very comfortable there, and I wouldn't mind paying a good weekly sum to secure peace at home."

Samuel Blythe did not stop to find the mustard tin. He crept slowly back up to his own room and sat down on the side of the bed. The Oldhampton Home! A sort of living tomb in which he was to be interred at Mills's capricious will, with his one afternoon out in the week, his daily allowance of tobacco, and his clean desolate cell.

He shuddered at the bare idea. But what was he to do? He remembered, with a shudder, that he had made over all his property to Jack and his wife—that had actually not one penny to call his own! And this was the return measure dealt out to him.

"Little Annie wouldn't have treated me so," said he, with one of the salt, stinging tears of old age burning its way down his cheek. "Little Annie would have been good to the old man."

Out into the night—the cold, sparkling, starry night—he made his way, with the vague, half-formed idea of going to Annie.

Martha Bowden lived twenty miles away, it is

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true, but he had walked twenty miles before, and he could again. Anything to get away from Millie's hard, sharp eyes, and put a distance between him and the Home, Oldhampton.

"Oh, Martha, look here! An old man, asleep by the roadside. Or, is he asleep? Come, Martha, quick! It's Uncle Sam—dear, good, old Uncle Sam!"

Annie had run out in the dewy calm of the early morning to get a few of the watercresses that old Mrs. Bowden liked for her breakfast; and to her surprise she found a prostrate figure stretched out beside the brook where Samuel Blythe had tried to drink, and fallen unconscious in the attempt.

"So it is," said Martha. "Whatever can have brought him here!"

And between them they lifted him up and carried him tenderly into the house.

"Will you keep me, Annie?" Samuel Blythe faltered, when sense and reason returned once more to his beclouded brain. "Will you give me a crust and shelter and keep me out of the Home, Oldhampton?"

"Dear Uncle Sam," said Annie, bursting into tears, "you were good to me once, and all that I have is yours, and welcome! And, oh! Uncle Sam, I shall be proud to have you come and live with me. And I'm married to Cousin Martha's son now, and we are so happy. Aren't we, Arthur, dear?"

Samuel Blythe looked sadly into her bright eyes. If she had married his boy, how different things would have been. If he could only have been content to let Fate alone, how much wisdom he would have shown! But he had managed affairs to suit himself, and this was the way he was suited.

Mildred Blythe tossed her head again when she heard where her father-in-law had taken refuge.

"I'm satisfied, if it suits him," said she. "All I know is that I shouldn't have tolerated him round the place much more."

Jack came to see his father, however, at the old Bowden farm-house, where Annie, a blooming young matron, held out her hand to welcome him without a vestige of the constraint that was so visible in his face and manner.

"Father," said he, "I'm sorry you and Millie don't get on together."

"It's the old story, my boy," said Uncle Sam. "The young birds crowd the old ones out of the nest. But I never could have stayed there to be sent to the Home, Oldhampton."

Jack coloured scarlet under the contemptuous lightning of Annie's eyes, and got away as best he could.

"There he goes," said Samuel Blythe, with a sigh; "and I have lost my boy for ever!"

But it was all his own fault, and he knew it.

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

HE: "I want you to understand no woman ever made a fool of me!" SHE: "Indeed! Who did it, then?"

HIBLER: "Does your wife help you in your work?" SCRIBBLER: "Yes, indeed! She always goes calling while I am writing."

GRANDPA: "Well, Sammy, where have you been to-day?" SAMMY (just back from the museum): "Oh, we've had a fine time, grandpa! We've been to a stuffed circus."

HORRIFIED MOTHER: "I should like to know how you happened to let young Simpkins kiss you!" DAUGHTER: "I—I—thought no one was looking."

THE ELDERLY BEILLE: "Ah, it brings back old memories to join in the dance once more." THE ELDERLY BEAU: "Yes, and I think it has also revived my rheumatism."

"WHY is it," they asked, "that you let your husband have his own way in everything?" "Because," she replied, "I like to have someone to blame when things go wrong."

MR. HENPEC: "Have you heard of the new rest-cure for nervous prostration? Patient isn't allowed to talk for weeks." MRS. HENPEC: "Huh! I'd just as soon die from prostration as exasperation."

GEORGE: "Is she a new woman?" JIM: "Hardly, I should say. In fact, I should judge from the number of cosmetics and things of that description I saw her buy that she is a very old woman done up afresh."

"My children," said the poor man sadly, "are crying for bread." "Which shows," replied the rich man coldly, "how much you have to be thankful for. Now mine are crying for bon-bons."

MRS. NABORLY: "Is your aunt on your mother's or father's side, Johnny?" JOHNNY: "Oh, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other. Depends on whose getting the best of it."

MRS. DE WICK: "I have trained my eldest daughter into a thorough housekeeper; there is nothing she does not know." MISS DE FLIGHT: "What a nice, handy maiden aunt she will make for your other daughters' children."

"WHY do the roses fade slowly away!" she inquired poetically. "Well," replied the bald-headed young man, "when you think it over, it's all for the best. It's more comfortable to have them fade slowly away than to go off all of a sudden, like a torpedo."

"You are an iceberg!" exclaimed her elderly but well-preserved adorer, pale with anger and mortification. "A dozen Cupids, with a hundred arrows each, could never find a vulnerable place in your heart." "Not if they used an old bean to shoot with, Mr. Wellup," coldly replied the young and beautiful Miss Fypppe.

BUTLER (recently engaged by a newly-fledged millionaire): "At what hour would you wish to dine, sir?" Millionaire: "At what hour do the best people dine?" Servant (repressing a smile): "Oh, they dine at different times, sir!" Millionaire: "Good! Then I also will dine at different times!"

He certainly wasn't handsome, but he had a loving heart. He bought his adored one a birthday present of a pug that broke down all the usual standards of ugliness and set up one of its own. The gift went right to the affections of the gushing maiden. "Oh, thank you, James; thank you," she warbled. "It's just like you, so it is."

DOROTHY has a baby-brother who has recently been ill, cutting his first teeth. The baldness of the baby's head has caused Dorothy great anxiety. She stood at the mother's knee one day gently patting the little head. "Be careful, Dorothy," said the mother. "You know poor little brother is ill. He is cutting his teeth." Dorothy patted the bald head reflectively. "Mamma," she said, "will it make him ill when he cuts his hair?"

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SOCIETY.

THE Duke of York has the right to wear fifty uniforms.

THE Duke and Duchess of York are, on returning from Ireland, to visit North Wales, and will be the guests at Gwydyr Castle of Earl and Countess Carrington. The Castle is a very picturesque place, bought by Lord Carrington from his kinsman, the Earl of Ancaster.

THE German Emperor will hold the spring review of his guard regiments on the Tempelhofer Fields on May 31st when a large number of Royal guests are expected in Berlin for the parade.

THE Princess Henry of Prussia is expected in Germany about the end of May. Her two little sons are at present in Darmstadt, where they are the guests of Princess Louis of Battenberg, their aunt.

THE Queen's birthday is to be celebrated on Wednesday, May 24th—except in London, where it cannot be observed on that day owing to the impossibility of the Ministerial full-dress banquet and the Foreign Office reception being given in the middle of the Whitsuntide recess.

It is understood that the Duchess of Coburg and her youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, will come to England about the middle of May, and that they will pay a visit to the Queen at Balmoral, where the Princess of Leiningen is also expected at Whitsuntide.

THE Duke and Duchess of Cumberland and Princess Marie Louise will probably come to England about the end of June on a visit to the Queen at Windsor Castle, in which case they will be the guests of the Prince and Princess of Wales at Marlborough House during their stay in London.

THE Emperor and Empress of Russia are residing at the Alexandrovsky Palace, Tsarskoe-Selo. It is rumoured that the Emperor will take the waters at Bad Nauheim during August, and that the Empress is to pay a visit to Schwalbach at the same time.

THERE are 1,500 people upon the German Emperor's list of employés, including 350 women servants, who are engaged in looking after the twenty-two Royal palaces and castles that belong to the Crown. Their wages are small. The women receive not more than £2 10s. a month, and the men-servants from £3 to £5 a month.

PRINCE RUPERT OF BAVARIA, grandson of the Prince Regent Leopold, who is the ultimate heir to the throne, has returned to Munich, after a long tour in the East. A marriage is talked of between Prince Rupert (who is nearly thirty) and the Archduchess Elisabeth, only child of the late Crown Prince Rudolph, who is in her sixteenth year. The Archduchess Elisabeth will have a large fortune.

THE German Emperor is to be accompanied to Cowes by the Empress, the Czar, Prince William, and Prince Eitel Frederic, and it is probable that they will arrive from Kiel in the Imperial yacht *Hohenzollern*, on Monday, July 24th, in which case the Emperor will carry out his long intended visit to Goodwood Races. The Emperor is to live on board his yacht, but the Empress and her sons will be the guests of the Queen at Osborne, where there are to be State banquets in the new Durbar room, and other entertainments.

It seems possible now that the Queen will delay her return home until the 5th inst., as she is naturally anxious to visit Coburg if possible. It is some years now since her Majesty visited the birthplace of the Prince Consort, and at her advanced age she, of course, recognises the limited opportunities that may be given her of journeying abroad. It would give her an opportunity of personally consoling the Duchess of Coburg, whose grief is still very poignant, and of visiting the tomb of her deceased grandson, Prince Alfred of Coburg, whose remains have now been placed beside those of his great uncle.

STATISTICS.

OUT of every three persons struck by lightning two recover.

THE French still fight an average of four thousand duels a year.

FORTY thousand men desert from the German Army every year.

THERE are 1,850 cities and towns in the United States equipped with electric light.

LONDON has forty restaurants in which only vegetable food is served.

THE world's supply of diamonds is 20 times greater than it was 30 years ago.

GEMS.

KINDNESS is the sum of life, the charm to captivate, and the sword with which to conquer.

THE light of friendship is like the light of phosphorus—seen plainest when all around is dark.

ALL that is good grows by being brought into light, while that which is evil, if consigned to darkness and silence, will perish of itself.

NOTHING is easier than ridicule; and in nine cases out of ten where ridicule is used it is resorted to only because it is the only weapon available. The man of intelligence will use his reason in the argument with his opponent; the man of knowledge will use his knowledge; but the man who has neither knowledge nor intelligence must resort to ridicule. It is a poorly furnished armoury which supplies no better weapon.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SALAD MAYONNAISE.—Yolk of one egg one scant teaspoonful of mustard, half-teaspoonful salt, a few shakes of tobacco sauce, one cupful best olive oil, juice of one lemon. Mix the egg, mustard, salt and pepper well in a large soup plate with a wooden fork; then pour in the oil in a very fine stream, or drop by drop, alternating it with the lemon juice, a little of each at a time. Make long strokes with the fork, and in hot weather set your plate on a block of ice while stirring.

CREAMED CHICKEN.—One fat hen, one pair of sweetbreads and half a can of mushrooms. Boil the chicken and sweetbreads, and when cold chop fine. Into a saucepan put one pint of milk or cream, and rub together two table-spoonfuls of butter and four table-spoonfuls of flour, and when the milk reaches boiling point stir in the butter and flour, and stir until smooth and thick. Flavour with half a grated onion, and season with salt and pepper to taste, and put in a baking-dish chicken, sweetbreads and mushrooms, well mixed. Cover with breadcrumbs, dot with bits of breakfast bacon and bake 15 minutes.

EGG CUTLETS.—Six hard-boiled eggs, one raw egg, well beaten; six drops onion juice, six drops lemon juice, one teaspoonful chopped parsley, one cup cream or milk, one table-spoonful butter and two table-spoonfuls flour. Salt and pepper to taste. Put milk into a double boiler, and when it reaches boiling point add flour and butter, which must first be rubbed smoothly together. Now chop your hard-boiled eggs coarsely and add them to your butter, onion juice, salt, pepper, lemon juice, and raw eggs. Add this mixture to your cream sauce, and cook until almost too thick to stir; then turn out on a platter, and when cold add the parsley and form into cutlets. Dip in beaten egg and cracker crumbs, and fry a light brown in boiling fat. Stick a sprig of parsley or paper frill on the small end of each, and serve with piquant sauce and green peas.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A PNEUMATIC corset, for the use of women learning to swim, has been invented.

ONLY twenty-four white elephants have been caught since the commencement of the Christian era.

In Vienna the municipal authorities are constructing a system of bicycle-paths for cyclists only.

THE first electric railway in the world was built in Ireland, from Bushmills to Giant's Causeway.

Two hundred thousand families, it has been calculated, are living in London on about one pound sterling a week.

AN elephant is possessed of such a delicate sense of smell that it can scent a human being at a distance of 1,000 yards.

WHITE and red ants are pests in the Philippines. The former infest every description of food, and the latter devour everything that is not metallic.

In Spain Hebrews are not permitted to erect and maintain houses of worship. They have no civil rights, and exist in the kingdom only as aliens.

A SMOKING tree has been found in the village of Ono, Japan. It smokes only in the evening, just after sunset, and the smoke issues from the top of the trunk. The tree is sixty feet high.

A FAVOURITE mode of suicide among the African tribes who dwell near Lake Nyassa is for a native to wade into the lake and calmly wait for a crocodile to open its mouth and swallow him.

BURGLAR-PROOF glass has been invented by a smart manufacturer. It is made by pouring molten glass over a network of steel wire. It is especially adapted for skylights and jewellers' windows.

In France it is a punishable offence for anyone to give infants under one year any form of solid food, unless such be ordered by written prescription, signed by a legally-qualified medical man.

THE custom of shaking hands, which is the most common among civilised nations, comes undoubtedly from remote barbarism, when two men meeting gave each other their weapon-hands as a security against treachery.

AMONG West Indian ladies, a lemon bath is almost a daily luxury. Several lemons or lemons are sliced into the water, and allowed to lie for half an hour in order that the juice may be extracted. A remarkable sense of freshness and cleanliness is given to the skin.

THE snail is blessed with great powers of vitality. A case is recorded of an Egyptian desert snail which came to life upon being immersed in warm water after having passed four years glued to a card in the English museum. Some species, in the collection of a certain naturalist, revived after they had apparently been dead for fifteen years; and snails, having been frozen for weeks in solid blocks of ice, have recovered on being thawed out. The eggs are as hard to destroy as the snail itself. They seem perfectly indifferent to freezing, and have been known to prove productive after having been shrivelled up in an oven to the semblance of grains of sand.

In no Eastern country are women so independent as they are in Burmah. There they manage their own affairs, keep stalls in the bazaar, marry whom they choose, and divorce their husbands when they please. They are unveiled, and mix freely with men in the business and pleasures of life. No one hinders them from dancing, or even smoking, with as many admirers as they like, and they smoke as if they meant it. Western women, if they smoke at all, generally merely toy with a dainty cigarette; but the Burmese smoke all day long at cigars longer than those used by men in Europe. The cigars they favour cost about a penny each, and they are a couple of inches in circumference and a foot long. In Burmah people smoke perpetually, and begin the habit even in childhood.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

P. J.—Perfectly justifiable.

IGNORANT.—Her maiden name.

JAMES.—You must employ a solicitor.

INQUIRER.—Replies are never sent by post.

JULIA.—Recommendations are never given.

T. B.—They would take their mother's share.

A. P. L.—There is no such agency in London.

FAULA.—The will should give her maiden name.

ELLA.—A woman is a competent witness to a will.

LITTLE MISS NOBODY.—Use a little spritz of wine.

MOTHER MAID.—Ask the secretary before filling up the form.

S. H.—Pay a visit to Somerset House; the will should be there.

MILKED.—It is to be obtained at any surgical instrument makers.

FRANK.—Have your teeth thoroughly looked to by a skilful dentist.

MELANCHOLY.—Take up some hobby that will fill up your spare time.

DISPENSARY.—Rudyard Kipling was born of English parents in India.

TEW.—The stamp is sufficient as the document is merely a receipt.

M. Y. C.—You had better lay the facts before a solicitor for advice.

ONE IN ANXIETY.—We would advise you to consult a good skin specialist.

OTTER.—The Prince of Wales sits in the House of Lords as Duke of Cornwall.

WORRIED.—An affiliation order cannot be applied for after the marriage of the mother.

ENTREPRENEUR.—It is not necessary to have a license when opening a servants' registry.

PURTY.—Cost depends upon the method, whether by means of license, or special license.

W. W.—We should imagine that your evident intelligence would be a point in your favour.

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—It is an unhealthy practice, and will cause injury in time.

MY SWEETHEART.—The name of David's mother is not known, but is by some supposed to be Nabash.

TUTTI.—"Tutti" simply means "all," and in music would signify all instruments or voices should join.

FORGE.—If you took it to an umbrella mender's they would make a better job of it by taking it off the ribs.

GALE.—It could only have been a copy; you can get another one at the church where you were married.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—If the man made a will that settles everything; the division must then be as the will directs.

H. G.—The Union Jack has the St. Andrew's Cross of Scotland laid upon the St. George's of England and St. Patrick's of Ireland.

TOLIAN.—Lemon-juice rubbed on after washing is the best whiteness you can use, and you will find that a good soap is also a great help.

GABRIEL.—Steady, persistent attention to cleanliness, and the clearing out of all little corners and dust-heaps is the only effectual cure.

G. A.—Only the sons of gentlemen having influence with the Lords of the Admiralty can obtain a nomination for the appointment.

GOQUETTE.—Meerschaum is a mineral found in some places on the seashore. The idea that it is "petrified sea foam" is quite imaginary.

HOUSEWIFE.—Fruit stains may be removed from table linen if briskly boiling water is poured upon the stains before the linen is washed.

READER'S LITTLE BROTHER.—The largest-sized lions measure about eight feet from nose to tail, the tail extending about half as far again.

PAMBY.—Try rubbing with whiting and lemon-juice first. If unsuccessful with that use sandpaper. The whiting injures the ivory teeth, so give it a fair trial.

TRIOLED LASSIE.—You should not have accepted such a gift without a proper understanding. You should ask him to explain his meaning or return the ring.

ANXIOUS BOY.—This appears to be too serious a matter for us to undertake the responsibility of advising you. You would find it much the safest plan to consult a respectable solicitor.

ROSE.—Scotland, England, Wales, and Ireland have no individual national anthems; "God save the Queen" does duty for all; Scotland and Ireland especially have, however, each a store of national songs.

LEAVING SCHOOL.—To become a first-class typist it is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the English language, and to be able to spell, punctuate, and construct sentences correctly. A knowledge of shorthand is also of advantage to the operator.

M. H.—We think you will find the field fully occupied; and without friends to give an introduction there would be the greatest difficulty in working yourself into favour.

ORDERELLA.—Get a piece of pumice stone from a colourman, make it into fine powder, and rub hands with that previous to soaping to wash; at night rub with glycerine and wear old gloves in bed.

BARTON.—The Queen could not sell all the ships in the navy and dismiss the army, because she is sworn to govern by and with the consent of the "Lords spiritual and temporal" and the Commons.

UNDER AGE.—The young man seems to have acted honourably in refusing to keep a clandestine appointment made after he had received such unequivocal tokens of your parents' displeasure.

ELINOR.—A minute gun is so called because a minute elapses between each discharge. It is generally a signal of distress at sea, or a gun fired at the death of a distinguished individual.

Mrs. K.—Seeing the youth declared he was eighteen years old, and looked it, the authorities are not bound to release him, and may refuse to do so; or he may be discharged and sent to prison for a month, perhaps.

PICTURE LOVER.—The largest painting in the world, exclusive of panoramas and cycloramas, is "Paradise," by Titian, in the grand salon of the Doge's Palace at Venice, being eighty-four feet wide by thirty-four feet high.

LEARN.—To become an actress requires some special training, but more than all a special talent and adaptability for the profession. The usual way to proceed for a stranger is to obtain an introduction to a manager, or employ a respectable theatrical agent.

CONSTANT READER.—Omit the lemon in half, dip it in the flowers of sulphur, and well rub the hat all over, using the second half of the lemon to finish off. When all dirt is removed, rinse the hat in clean cold water and hang in the air, but not in the sun, to dry.

HOLAON IN SILENCE.

At eve is silence:
When slowly fades the light,
Flowers fold their petals white,
Each says to each "Good-night."

At eve is silence:
Leaves murmur softly then,
And cling together, when
They whisper their "Good-night."

At eve is silence:
Two souls must drift apart—
Each hides a breaking heart
To say the last "Good-night."

At eve is silence:
God's world in peace will sleep;
His angels watch will keep,
After Death says "Good-night!"

INQUIRER.—The feast of Easter was fixed by the Council of Nice in the year 325, to be held on the Sunday which falls upon, or comes after, the full moon which happens next after March 21st, and as such it stands in the rubric of the Church of England.

JOYCE.—Melt a quarter of a pound of tallow, then pour it into a jar and add to it the same weight of olive oil; stir, and let stand until cool; apply a small quantity occasionally with a piece of flannel. It will soften any leather.

A. B.—Put one pound refined sugar in a basin, pour over it one pint of lime juice, and stir with a silver spoon till the sugar is dissolved; put in bottle, cork and seal, and keep in a dry place for use. The juice of limes is imported from the West Indies and from South Africa.

DOMESTICATED GIRL.—Make a fine puff paste, and roll it out quite thin, cut it into pieces about two and half inches long. Cover each piece with any jam you like, then wrap them over three times, damp the edge and press lightly, sift over castor sugar, and set in a very hot oven.

NERVOUS AMATEUR.—There are various kinds of lozenges that are taken for the voice; a glass of milk with an egg beaten up in it just before singing is a good thing, and many people believe in a spoonful of glycerine with a spoonful of lemon juice added to it as being good for the purpose.

MADAME.—Get some emery powder and some paraffin oil; dip a small, rather short-haired brush—a tooth-brush would answer—into the paraffin, then into the powder, and brush well. You will soon find the rust will come away. After that polish with a soft, dry leather, followed by a soft cotton cloth.

AMATEUR.—Have your shirt or collars ironed in the usual way, then to glass it have a nice clean damper; wet it a little, and rub it on a cake of white soap; pass this lightly over the linen, and then rub it with the polishing iron; rub very hard, and if you use the heel of the iron you get a fine polish; you better have a pretty hard board to polish on, as the harder the board the higher the polish; but an ordinary shirt board does pretty well, and is easier at first; instead of soap you may dip your damper in water in which is a few drops of glycerine; that does well.

IGNORANT.—The husband of your relative having died before her, his relatives, no matter how near in degree to the husband, have no claim whatever upon her estate; as she does not seem to be survived by any brothers or sisters, or their issue, what she possessed will now go to her father's next-of-kin in nearest degree.

ONLY CHILD.—Such a request on the part of the gentleman is highly improper, because fraught with deceit and distrust of those who have a right to be fully informed on such an important subject. If you are worth marrying, you are worthy of being placed in a position which will relieve you from anxiety, and enable you to be open and candid, as it is your duty to be, with your father.

MARTILLA.—To restore black hair which has become rusty, add to half a cup of rain-water one teaspoonful of borax, and the same quantity of alcohol; squeeze the lace carefully through this three or four times, and then rinse in a cup of hot water in which a black kid glove has been boiled, pull out the edges of the lace until nearly dry, and press for two days between the leaves of a heavy book.

A PERFECT FRIGID.—The trouble is all in your own sensitiveness; appearances such as you present are far too common to excite a second glance in any mixed company; the electric needle no doubt would eradicate the hair, but except skilfully applied, it might leave unsightly scars, and this is the objection to almost any operation for removal of the hair, that it may set up skin disease, which would be more unsightly than the hair itself.

HELENA.—First wash the board, then sprinkle it with sand, and scrub it with a brush the same way as the grain of the wood, so that the dirt is taken off without making the board rough. Rub the sand off in plenty of cold water, wipe it with a clean cloth, and set it in the air until dry. In scrubbing floors and tables, do not use soda, for it makes the boards a bad colour, and does not cleanse better than soap with plenty of warm water.

HARRIS.—If you will write to the Secretary Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W., particulars of subjects set to candidates for assistant-factory inspectorships, also regarding dates and places of next examination, full information will be sent gratis. There is theoretical knowledge required, arithmetic up to four first rules, and handwriting to dictation; candidates require to be recommended to the Home Secretary by a member of Parliament.

UNHAPPY MAID.—The young man who treated you in such a fashion is unworthy of the love or friendship of any true, good girl. It is very apparent that he took advantage of your youth and inexperience to deceive you with false promises which he never intended to keep. Your case is an illustration of the folly and danger of secret engagements between very young people. We cannot suggest anything for you to do, unless you have a father or brother who will see that the young man gets what he deserves. Such cases as yours are, unfortunately, not rare, and it is a difficult matter to get redress.

YOUNG MISTAKE.—Table centres are usually made of silk, satin, or velvet, or some piece of sewed or creased work. They are only used at meals—dinner or supper or lunch. They may be laid on flat, or, if of thin silk, ruffled up prettily, and flowers or leaves laid here and there. Now it is getting fashionable to place flowers or maiden-hair, or, in autumn, coloured leaves on the centre of the table, where the glasses and vases of flowers are placed, but these flower vases are placed on the table centre and about it. 2 Pillow shams and frilled pillow cases are both quite suitable; either looks very pretty, and so does prettily worked bed-spreads.

CORDON BLEU.—An ox head; one hundred peppercorns, four sprigs parsley, salt, two small onions, eight cloves; there may also be included, to improve flavour, twenty-five allspice berries, four sprigs thyme and marjoram, and four bay leaves; clean head thoroughly, put into a large pot, just cover with water, and simmer five or six hours; take out head, cut meat from bones, put bones back into pot, add the flavoured, simmer an hour, take off lid and boil fast for half-hour; cut meat in small squares, strain liquor over the meat, wet some moulds or basins with cold water and fill them with meat and liquor, let stand for a night to cool, then turn out; garnish with parsley; half the quantities may be used if desired.

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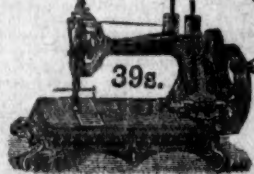
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